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### Kuwassi Palaver

Peter Corley-Smith

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"The Kuwassi Palaver"

by

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## CHAPTER 1

The first three months of the year 1947 were the coldest in living memory. The snow persisted for so long people began to talk of a change in climate, a return to the good old days of jingling sleighs and whole oxen roasted on the ice covering the Thames. They chattered brightly about the prolonged cold spell and when, as so often happened, the electricity failed or the coal ran out they sought to recapture the sense of duty and shared discomfort which had made life tolerable during the war. Anson Payne made some attempts to fall in with this mood, but failed to find any consolation in the knowledge that other people were as uncomfortable as he was. The grimy blanket of snow which covered the ground for so long merely added to his gloom. The cold stung, sharp as his anxiety. He felt isolated from the hopes and ambitions surrounding him as he stepped cautiously down to the curb, his breath rising in a cloud. The bus skidded briefly before pulling away to leave an uninterrupted view of the vacant, bomb-damaged lot across the road. Like the ruins of an Inca city, the shattered masonry had long since disappeared into a jungle of weeds. And now a fifty foot advertisement had taken the place of the building so that Jane Russell's vast bosom dominated the scene. The Outlaw, Anson reflected wryly, had a large and splendid range to roam.

Digging his hands a little more deeply into his pockets, he turned to walk slowly towards his destination. He was on his way to a job interview, his resentment at the prospect growing stronger each step he took. The war had exposed him to too many interviews; he had come to dread the ritual of question and answer upon which so much could depend. And today a great deal depended on it. He had squandered his gratuity down to the last few quid. All he had left was the battered old Hillman which might bring in enough to see him through another month. His friends all seemed to have relatives to whom they could turn—elderly, influential relatives who could "have a word with somebody." But Anson was only on the fringe of influence. He could harvest any amount of advice but no concrete assistance. He was learning how carefully people dispense their store of patronage.



He paused to blow his nose, then turned into the bleak financial canyon known as Teal Street. In the fading afternoon it looked inexpressibly dreary; so dreary that Anson felt a spark of optimism. If he did manage to land the job, it might turn out to be a bit of all right, he reflected hopefully, conjuring up a Somerset Maughanish vision of the tropics. Grimy brick walls on either side of him changed for a moment to green luxurious foliage with exotic birds darting in and out. In the dazzling sunshine, happy smiling natives stood aside respectfully as he passed, a lean bronzed figure in khaki shorts and bush shirt. He was just trying to decide what he should be wearing on his head when he arrived at his destination and the vision faded abruptly. Pushing through a massive swing door, he found himself in a lobby so dark he could barely read the directory on the wall.

The offices of the Kuwassi Mining Company were on the third floor. After glancing at the lift, which was padlocked, Anson climbed slowly up the stone stairs. At the third floor he paused a moment before the frosted glass door to smooth his hair and straighten his tie. Above the faint rumble of traffic from the streets he could hear a typewriter clacking slowly, but there was no response to his knock. He hesitated, seized by a surprisingly strong impulse to turn round and walk out of the building. He could easily come back another day; write and ask for another interview. But what the hell for? he thought, irritated by his own cowardice. He turned the knob and walked in.

The room was a small one, crammed with filing cabinets and dark-brown office furniture. A clerk and a typist were the only two persons in sight, both wearing overcoats. The typist sat behind a wooden counter by the door and took not the slightest notice of him. A young, untidy looking girl with a bad complexion and a discontented pout on her lips, she sat huddled over the typewriter, picking out keys with dogged concentration.

The clerk looked up as Anson entered, and Anson looked back expectantly. "Doris," the clerk said patiently, "attend to the gentleman."

Doris raised her eyes at last, one finger poised over the keyboard like a hovering sparrow-hawk.

"Good afternoon," said Anson. "I have an appointment to see Mr. Dawson."

"I don't think 'e's in," Doris replied, glancing hopefully at the typewriter.

"'Strewth," the clerk sighed. "Go'n see, girl. An' if 'e isn't, see

old Carter."

The girl stood up reluctantly, lifted the flap of the counter and disappeared through the door without asking Anson his name. "Take a seat," the clerk invited. "Silly little cow wouldn't think of offering you one. The girl oo's supposed to be here is off sick wiv the 'flu. Everyone's sick," he added complacently, gesturing to the empty desks.

"Thanks," said Anson, removing a packet of wrapped stationary from the single wooden chair by the counter and sitting down. He contemplated his shoes for a moment, wondering if he could risk a quick cigarette. But there were no ashtrays in sight and he decided against it. Mr. Dawson himself might come out, and then there would be the difficulty of trying to get rid of it before they shook hands.

"You 'ere for a job?" the clerk asked.

"That's right."

"Going out to the Coast, eh?"

"Yes, if they'll have me."

The clerk blew thoughtfully on his mittened fingers. "Often thought of 'aving a bash meself. But I dunno—all them smelly wogs. Don't reckon the ball and chain'd buy it."

Anson smiled to himself at the thought of this seedy individual upholding the white man's prestige among the heathen. "No," he agreed. "I don't suppose it's everyone's cup of tea. May not like it myself—but I thought I'd try it for a year."

The clerk nodded, his lips pursed judiciously, and Anson looked up at the faded photograph of a mine headgear on the wall. Just what were the wogs going to be like, he wondered uneasily. The only contact he could recall had been with the West-Indian Negro in the next bed to his at I.T.W., and Anson had always felt thoroughly uncomfortable with him. One minute he had seemed embarrassingly obsequious, the next insufferably arrogant; but Anson had never been quite sure how much of this was due to his own prejudices. What would it be like to be surrounded by Negroes, never sure whether you were sorry for them, or whether you despised them? He looked up as Doris reappeared through the door.

"Mr. Dawson's not in," she informed Anson triumphantly. "But Mr. Carter'll see you in Mr. Dawson's office." She moved behind the counter and lowered the flap. "You are Mr. Painter, aren't chew?" she added, as she sat down in front of the typewriter again.

"Payne," said Anson, rising and looking at the door.

"For Christ's sake!" the clerk muttered. "'Ere, come on, I'll show you."

The room to which he led Anson was even gloomier than the one they had just left, a sombre relic of Victorian executive luxury. But Anson was too disconcerted by the appearance of Mr. Carter to notice this. For Mr. Carter was an elderly facsimile of the clerk. His features reflected an uneasy compromise between subservience and a strictly limited authority. Thin grey hair had been brushed carefully across the bald patch on the top of his head, and even in the dubious light of this office, his suit was unmistakably shiny. Anson's resentment flared up at the prospect of being interviewed for a job by this office hack, and he thought he detected a corresponding resentment in Mr. Carter, whose pale blue, rather tired eyes seemed coldly unenthusiastic as he greeted Anson.

"Mr. Dawson asked to say how sorry he was he couldn't see you—he was called away to an urgent conference." Surely there was a hint of amusement in his tone at the thought of Mr. Dawson apologising to anyone as insignificant as Anson. "Let me take your coat," he offered.

Anson parted with his coat reluctantly, then suddenly realized there was a small fire burning in the grate. He moved to warm his hands. Mr. Carter hung up his coat and offered him a chair before retreating behind the huge oak desk which dominated the room. "I was just reading your application," he said, holding it up unnecessarily. "Will you excuse me for a moment while I finish it?"

"Yes, of course." Anson studied him out of the corner of his eye. Obviously he wasn't going to get the job or he wouldn't have been fobbed off onto this old dodderer who, with his cautiously genteel accent, was clearly little more than chief clerk. But on the other hand, if they didn't want him, why the hell had they brought him all the way up to London?

"Yes, well you appear to have a satisfactory background," said Mr. Carter, putting down Anson's application form. "But tell me, won't you find it a little difficult to settle down—after flying, I mean?"

"I daresay I will, sir. But it's a problem lots of us are having to face at the moment."

"You didn't, er—didn't consider carrying on with your flying? Making a career of it?"

"Oh yes, I thought about it."

"And you didn't fancy your chances?"

Anson glanced at him quickly and any doubts about Mr. Carter's sympathies vanished as he observed the gleam of satisfaction in his eye. This was going to be even grimmer than he had anticipated.

"No," he admitted with a smile. "There were too many ahead of me—too many people with far more flying experience than I have."

"I see." Mr. Carter scratched his nose, feeling a little better. He was not, as Anson suspected, intent on shooing him away; on the contrary, Mr. Carter had firm instructions to make sure that Anson accepted the job. But since it was the first time he had ever been entrusted with the task of interviewing a potential employee, he was at once exhilarated and rather nervous. The interview, for Mr. Carter, represented a significant elevation from the rank and file of clerkdom and he was determined to make a success of it.

Unfortunately, Mr. Dawson's attitude had done much to rob the occasion of the pleasure he should be experiencing. "Sorry to saddly you with this," Mr. Dawson said, in the preoccupied tones of a man with more important things on his mind. "But with all the staff sick...." It sounded more like a last resort than a gesture of confidence in his ability. "Thing is," Mr. Dawson went on, "we must make sure we get this fellow. Need him and half a dozen more like him in the next year. But of course, we don't want him to realize it. Begin by asking him a few awkward questions to keep him off balance. You know the sort of thing...well, no—come to think of it, you probably don't, do you? Ask him why he didn't go on flying for a living. And ask him what made him decide to take up mining. The answer's money, of course; but he won't be inclined to admit it, and it'll keep him on his toes. Main thing is to try and make the job sound attractive. Don't let him realize he's just a white skin going out to supervise black ones...."

Mr. Dawson hesitated suddenly as he recalled who he was talking to. "That is—I mean, tell him he'll be working closely with the chief geologist for the first few months, until he gets the hang of things. No need to be too explicit."

"Yes," Mr. Carter replied bleakly.

"Now let's see, what else?" Mr. Dawson grunted with amusement. "Only the trifling question of salary," he smiled. "He's asking for sixty a month. Try and beat him down. But don't make too much of a thing of it. If he looks like holding out, let him have it. And if you run into any serious difficulties,

ask him to put up for the night in a hotel and see me in the morning. You can get Jenkins to give him a fiver out of petty cash. Come to think of it, do that in any case. We'll almost certainly have to get him a passport, and I want to send him off on the next boat. I think the Ashanti sails next Friday--might check that for me."

Mr. Carter had walked back to the cubicle which served as his office seething with anger. It had taken him more than thirty years to attain the position of managing clerk and a salary of nine pounds ten a week. Now he was calmly instructed to offer very nearly double that amount to someone with absolutely no experience or training at all. In a vague sort of way he had always realized that people who went out there earned more money than the London staff, but somehow it had never seemed to concern him personally; and he had certainly never appreciated how large the discrepancy was. And why, before he had even set eyes on him, was Mr. Dawson so sure that this Payne was an acceptable employee? Mr. Carter hadn't seen the application yet, but he knew the answer to that one. Payne would have a public school education. All that morning, Mr. Carter had been focussing a lifetime of resentment against the facile passport of old-boyism on Anson. He would, he promised himself, not only keep him off balance, he would make him crawl as well.

The trouble was, now they were facing one another, Mr. Carter couldn't recall any of the shrewd and disturbing questions which had occurred to him that morning. In fact, his mind had gone blank. For the moment he could think of nothing at all to ask him. And Anson, instead of being nervous and self-conscious as Mr. Carter had hoped, appeared to be perfectly composed as he waited for the next question.

"I see," said Mr. Carter again, studying the application. "Payne. That's a Scotch name, isn't it?"

"Scottish, yes."

"You don't appear to have indicated your mother's name--her maiden name?"

Anson had forgotten what his mother's maiden name had been; and in any case, the question always irritated him because it seemed so irrelevant. "No, I haven't," he replied. "You see, I never met her before she was married."

As soon as he'd said it, he looked away, appalled. The crude, barrack-room wisecrack had slipped out almost as though someone else had spoken. He glanced quickly at Mr. Carter and saw the look of surprise change to a frown.

"Oh yes," said Mr. Carter eventually, his smile as wintry as the pale rectangle of slate grey sky Anson could see through the window over his shoulder. There was a long, embarrassing pause before Mr. Carter retreated to the safety of Mr. Dawson's second suggestion.

"Why," he asked stiffly, "did you decide to take up mining?"

Anson looked at the tiny fire struggling to stay alive in the grate, wondering if there was still a slender chance of recovering from his gaffe. Experience had taught him this was always the key question—the darling of all the complacent interrogators he had faced. Why do you want to join the Air Force? What made you decide you wanted to be a pilot? He turned back to Mr. Carter with what he hoped was a conciliatory smile.

"For a number of reasons, sir. Firstly, I want to see a little more of the world, and mining's obviously a good way to do that. Secondly, I'm hoping to find it a very interesting occupation...and also, of course, it's a tolerably well paid one...."

"Perhaps not as well paid as you imagine," Mr. Carter put in quickly. Anson looked at him without replying, and he tapped the application. "I see you are suggesting a salary of sixty pounds a month?"

"Yes, that's right."

"May I inquire how you arrived at this figure?"

"Yes, of course. One of my friends has a father in the Colonial Service, and I asked him."

Mr. Carter's face grew tight with anger. He might have known. It was a huge club in which no one need ever be uncertain or at a loss. There was always someone to whom they could turn for advice. "Do me a favour, old boy. Have a word with your old man and ask him what I should put down for a salary. Haven't a clue what you need to live on out there." And the figure had been just right—neither too much nor too little. Dawson had accepted it without hesitation.

"Well, I'm afraid your friend's father was a little optimistic," he said tartly. "We are not in a position to offer you more than forty-five a month."

Anson's pause, as he decided to change tack, was almost imperceptible. "Perhaps, before we discuss the salary, you could tell me a little more about the job...and about living conditions. You've seen it, of course—and I haven't."

A faint flush tinged Mr. Carter's pale cheeks. His closest approach to

the tropics had been a pre-war excursion to the Isle of Wight on the S.S. Brighton Belle. He was so flustered, one of his normally immaculate aitches escaped him.

"As a matter of fact, I 'aven't," he admitted. "But I can tell you all about--all you'll need to know about it. To begin with, you'll have to learn the geology of the mine. You'll be working under the chief geologist, as a member of the survey department."

Anson scratched the back of his hand and looked at him expectantly. So far, he had been told nothing about the job at all.

"Does this mean I'm supposed to become a surveyor as well as a geologist?"

"You will certainly be expected to learn something about surveying, yes."

"Sounds like quite a platefull, doesn't it?"

Mr. Carter was rapidly getting out of his depth. "Lots of people have done it before you," he replied sharply. "It's an apprenticeship, and they was all 'appy to be earning a salary while they was learning their trade. That's why we don't offer no more than forty-five a month."

"Yes, I appreciate that. But there are other considerations. I presume you have to keep up appearances...have servants, and that sort of thing?"

Anson was aware that mention of servants would arouse deep-rooted antagonisms in Mr. Carter and he suffered a momentary qualm at the prospect of walking out without the job. But it was obvious that Mr. Carter knew nothing about either the work or the living conditions. And in any case, he could always back down about the salary later if necessary.

"The simple fact is," he went on calmly, "I've been advised by someone--someone I know I can rely on--not to accept less than sixty."

Mr. Carter struggled for a little while with the temptation to dismiss Anson. He could say that he was totally unsuitable. But Mr. Dawson had been very positive, and if Anson did happen to be recalled for another interview, there could be all sorts of awkward repercussions.

"In that case," he shrugged, "perhaps you wouldn't mind putting up at a hotel for the night and seeing Mr. Dawson in the morning."

"At my own expense?"

"No. If you will bring the bill with you tomorrow, I'll see to it that you are reimbursed."

"The trouble is, I didn't have time to cash a cheque this morning...."

Mr. Carter gave up. "Very well, I will let you have an advance out of petty cash."

"Thank you very much." Anson breathed a sigh of relief; he felt sure there would have been no advance unless he stood a good chance of getting the job. And since he had arranged for a night out with friends, an extra quid or two would come in very handy. He walked down the stairs humming to himself. Life had suddenly opened up in front of him. He could have a glass of beer again without worrying about where the money was coming from for the next one. He could take a girl out to dinner and buy himself a decent pair of shoes and sell the car without bickering like a pawnbroker to squeeze the last penny out of it. On the way to the bus stop he spotted a taxi. Waving it over, he climbed in and sat back, enjoying bright visions of tropical luxury. The feeling of humiliation which had crept over him during the last few months had abruptly vanished.

But the night on the town almost failed to materialize. Only two of the friends he had arranged to meet turned up, and they both suggested by their manner that they would rather be elsewhere. One of them brought a girl friend—a girl so sleek and well-dressed that Anson wondered how many young men had been persuaded to part with their clothing coupons. Tony Sellers had been to school with Anson, then become a major in the Tank Corps. He had always been a little pompous, and the new job in the city, which he had apparently walked into without any trouble as soon as he was de-mobbed, had made him even more so.

"I got it all right—just under a thousand a year," Anson told him, irritated because he felt obliged to exaggerate.

"That all? Wouldn't catch me going out to a dump like that for twice the money." Tony picked up his change from the bar and walked towards a table without asking anyone if they wanted to sit down. Dierdre, the girl friend, smiled ironically at Anson as she turned from the bar. He followed her to the table. She was damned attractive, and he felt a growing resentment. In spite of his flabbiness and his bad manners, Sellers always had a pretty girl in tow. The pub was nearly empty and Anson looked around a trifle wistfully as he recalled the last time he had been here, just before the end of the war. Half the squadron had come down from Tempsford; the place had been packed to the doors, and it had turned into one of those gloriously uncomplicated evenings which were so enjoyable because nobody had any plans. Now everyone did have



plans, careers to worry about, and none of them could afford to drink—except people like Sellers who had jobs in the city about which they were curiously reticent.

"Where're the rest of them?" Tony demanded, looking at his watch.

"Oh, they'll be along. It's early yet." But Anson had a sudden premonition that they wouldn't. The easy wartime thing was over. No one had really wanted to meet him tonight; they had been evasive when he phoned, embarrassed. He drank the Scotch Tony had bought and they talked unenthusiastically about the war and about their schooldays. Anson looked up in relief as he saw Peter Coles threading his way through the empty tables towards them. Peter had gone back to university to study physics. He looked very tired.

"Sorry I'm late—but I shouldn't really be here. Got to give some bloody report on isotopes in seminar tomorrow. Just dropped in for a quick one. Any luck with the job?" he asked Anson as he sat down.

"Think so. I've got to go back in the morning."

"What are you going to be doing?"

"Haven't a clue. But you know me—versatile."

"I think you're a bloody fool going out there...where is it, the Cameroons, or somewhere?" said Tony.

"Gold Coast."

"Sounds awfully glamorous," Dierdre remarked. "Will you be thrashing niggers with horsewhips, and things?"

"They're more likely to be thrashing him, the way things are going," Tony grunted.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Tony shrugged. "Use your loaf. India's getting it's independene any day now. Only a matter of time before the wogs in Africa start playing up. You're in for all sorts of riots and beastliness. And you needn't expect any help from dear old Clem and his bunch of shop stewards. They can't wait to prove how democratic they are by unloading the empire."

Peter lit a cigarette and grimaced at Anson sympathetically. "Don't see how it can be much worse than it is here," he said. "Nationalized coal mines and no bloody coal. Factories shutting down all over the place. Jesus Christ, I thought I knew what it was like to be cold during the war. But I didn't—not until the last few weeks."

"Effing's the only way to keep warm," said Dierdre brightly. She spoke

so unself-consciously that Anson looked at her in surprise.

"And have you been managing to keep warm all right?" he inquired.

"You won't have to worry, anyway," she said, ignoring his question. "Lots of little black mistresses. That's one of the perks of being a Bwana, isn't it?"

"I'll let you know in a year or so." Anson dropped his eyes, colouring slightly as he realized that she was still looking at him with an odd expression. Something to do with the remark about the black mistresses. Inexplicably, the thought seemed to have excited her.

Peter finished his drink and stood up. "Sorry whack, must get back to those isotopes. We'll tie on a proper one before you go, eh?"

Anson watched him walk away, feeling depressed because he knew that they wouldn't tie one on. Peter would be too busy; he would offer excuses about exams. And to make matters worse, Tony chose that moment to start lecturing Anson. "The more I think about it, the more convinced I am that you're a damn fool," he said. "Labour's just about had it. Another six months and the Conservatives'll be back in, then things'll soon pick up. You'd be much wiser to hang on for a while. Come to think of it, I can probably wangle you some sort of a job to keep you going until things do buck up."

"Thanks for the offer," said Anson, growing more and more irritated by Tony's patronizing tone, "but your kind of city-slicker stuff doesn't appeal to me."

Tony flushed. "Suit yourself--only trying to help." He stood up and walked across to the cloak-room without excusing himself. Anson glanced at Dierdre and found she was still examining him with a sort of speculative interest.

"Where are you staying tonight?" she asked.

"Strand Palace. I always used to stay there on forty-eights during the war. Couldn't think...."

"Because they don't mind if you take a girl up to your room?"

"No...well, yes--that too, I suppose."

"I know a place where we can get a bottle of black market gin," she said. Anson was so startled he couldn't think of an answer.

"What about Tony?" he objected, finally.

"What about him? He's a crashing bore."

Anson sipped his whiskey. He felt suspicious. It was too good to be true...doubly attractive because it would be such a smack in the eye for Tony. But he found himself a little scared of her--she was too sophisticated, almost

a Mayfair girl--and before he could frame a reply, Tony had rejoined them. He refused Anson's offer of another drink and they left.

Dierdre looked at Anson with a faintly contemptuous expression as they parted outside the pub. He tried to shrug it off as he walked back to his hotel, but he felt depressed. It was still bitterly cold and the lights for which they had waited so long had not really come back on. Most of the shops had only a single bulb burning in the back, and the windows were in darkness. Piles of dirty snow lay like refuse in the gutters. The street-lights glowed yellow and dull as horn lanterns in the cold fog, and figures muffled in greatcoats converted to civilian overcoats shuffled by unvivaciously in the gloom. Tony's prophecies of violence had dismayed Anson. He recalled now the arrogantly flaring nostrils of the West Indian and the almost overwhelming urge he had sometimes felt to smash his fist into that flat nose. What was it going to be like? His imagination gave him only visions of dapper District Commissioners in huge topees, presiding over a shadowy jungle; of turbulent savages with flaring nostrils and pink mouths; of black girls padding towards him across coconut matting on soft, naked feet. He collided with someone as they both stepped the same way to avoid each other.

"Why'n'cher look where yer going!" he snarled.

"Up yours," Anson replied lamely, and turned to watch a policeman on the other side of the road testing doors to see if they were locked. No matter how hard he tried, Anson couldn't recapture any of the optimism he had enjoyed after the interview.

It was half-past nine when Anson walked up the steps of the Strand Palace. In Accra, it was two hours earlier and Kwotze Baru, a heavy-set African with a mass of tightly crinkled hair was just about to climb the rickety wooden stairs which led to his room above a Syrian shoe shop. He, too, paused for a moment to gaze across the road before going inside. A cyclist had collided with an old mammy, spilling the basket of bananas she had been carrying on her head. In the middle of a fierce tirade directed at the cyclist, the old woman broke off abruptly and turned to pursue a piccanin who had seized a banana and set off down the road. Kwotze smiled and sniffed appreciatively. The warm darkness was filled with wood smoke, mingling with the smell of cassava and yams cooking and the pungency of dried fish being curried for evening meals.

When he reached the landing before the door of his musty little room,

he paused again, rubbing his flat nose and relishing once again the ceremony of the courtroom and the gratifying knowledge that everyone was looking at him and him alone. He had expected to spend the night in a cell, but the magistrate had bound him over for six months. At eleven o'clock that morning, when the bank was at its busiest, Kwotze had walked over to one of the wickets reserved for Europeans only and demanded change for a ten shilling note. The teller had blinked in surprise, then directed him to the counter on the other side of the building, marked 'Coloureds'. Kwotze had refused to go. Twenty minutes later he had been arrested for using abusive language and disturbing the peace. The European policeman had rapped him across the buttocks with a swagger stick as he climbed into the back of the police van, and the magistrate had talked of insolence.

But it had been worth it. Kwotze opened the door and walked into his little room, his eyes gleaming with satisfaction as he recalled the looks of dismay and outrage on the faces of the Europeans in the bank. How easy it was to frighten them.

## CHAPTER 2

George Pemberton waited while Kumosa, his chop-boy, removed the steel plate covering the opening in the concrete wall blocking the drive, then leaned through it and shone his light hopefully into the gloom beyond. The sickly smell of decaying timber was much stronger on the far side of the wall, toward the dead end of the tunnel. There was nearly a foot of water on the ground and the hanging wall was badly fractured. Some of the twelve by twelve cribbing had given way and it was obviously unsafe to venture any further. He shook his lamp in an attempt to brighten it, then grunted in disappointment and turned away. He was in an abandoned development drive, and had been hoping to reach the end to check the reef. But at this depth—the 3000 foot level—even a little noise could bring down a heavy fall, perhaps set off a pressure blast.

"Make you putum back," he said, and Kumosa began to replace the steel plate. George hooked his lamp into his belt, took off his hard hat and ran the rim across his forehead. A stream of sweat fell into his shirt and he stood for a moment, shaking the last drops off the hat. It occurred to him that he might be able to reach the end of the drive through a winze from the 2500 level. His lamp sputtered and he thumped it irritably. As always, Kumosa's shone steadily. "Same old bloody palaver," he grumbled. "Your light plenty strong—mine go small-small."

The boy looked over his shoulder as he tightened down the retaining nuts with a Stillson. "I go fixum one time, massa."

George grunted again and sat down, balanced on his hard hat on one of the rails. This must be just about the last mine in the world using carbide lamps instead of electric, he thought, deriving odd satisfaction from the knowledge. But if he couldn't find an answer to the problem of dwindling ore reserves, it wouldn't be a mine at all in another eighteen months. The reef appeared to be petering out to the west. It had flattened almost to the horizontal just below the 2800 level, and sample values had dropped to less than three pennyweights to the ton. At least four were necessary for survival and George

couldn't make up his mind whether to recommend a new drilling programme to see if it improved again lower down, as it had occasionally in other parts of the mine, or to attempt a reactivation here in the eastern extremity.

The eastern workings had been producing handsomely in the early thirties, until a stope collapsed and they were shut down and abandoned. It would cost a great deal to pump them out and put up enough timber to make them safe now, but if he could only get in and take some samples, the management might be persuaded to make the attempt. A shift boss named Bill Gilby was the sole European left who had been on the mine when the accident occurred, and even though he was known to exaggerate, George felt there must be some truth in his claim that the last twenty feet of the development drive, blasted out in the three or four days before the stope caved in, had revealed pockets of native gold in the reef. If this were true, there might be enough ore beyond the wall to keep the mine in production for several years yet.

Kumosa, squatting opposite him, worked on the lamp. He lit it. The flame shone steadily and he put it down beside George.

"Give me a drink," said George, "and the towel. I think we'll forget about this for today and go check on Ankrah."

He took a long drink of the lukewarm lime juice, handed the bottle back and dried his head and neck with the towel. It was a futile gesture because there was no ventilation in this section of the mine. The temperature was well over a hundred degrees, and within half a minute the sweat was dribbling down his face again. Kumosa's body, clad only in shorts and boots, glistened in the hard white light of their carbide lamps. George rose, put on his hard hat and waited while Kumosa pushed the bottle and towel back into the gas-mask case he carried for a haversack, then turned to walk back along the drive.

He would have to speak to Arthur about it soon, he thought, resentful that he couldn't make the decision himself. Arthur was the general manager, and he would promptly send for Hendrickson, a consulting geologist who flew out from London two or three times a year and treated George with patronizing amusement. Intelligence and ability were no longer enough; you had to have a degree before you could make decisions. George was chief geologist on the mine, but he had no formal qualifications—he had picked up all he knew from experience as a sampler, and from the old text books left behind by his predecessor. George's resentment against Hendrickson was heightened by a grudging acknowledgement that he had no real talent for geology himself. He

had never learned to think in three dimensions. But even if he could, he would have very little respect for formal geology. He suspected that a good deal of what passed for scientific appraisal was really guesswork, dignified by obscure technical phrases. There was every reason to hope that he was going to succeed Arthur as general manager when he retired at the end of his present tour, and George looked forward to the prospect with growing pleasure. He had been born, he felt convinced, to be an administrator.

Pausing at the junction of the main haulage to wait for the little diesel with its train of ore trucks to pass, he stepped back between the tracks and walked on towards the ladderway he would have to climb to reach the stope being sampled by one of his gangs. He walked awkwardly, grumbling to himself as he had a thousand times before because the sleepers under the rails were always placed at the wrong interval for a normal stride. But his dissatisfaction was in reality a much more fundamental one. The fact that he had to work in a mine at all still rankled. His grandfather had been Assistant-Commissioner of Police in the F.M.S. and his father a senior political officer in India. George was confident he would follow in their footsteps, but he reached his majority too late to see action in the first World War--too late to compete against the ex-officers who applied for the Colonial Service immediately it was over. And because his father was killed at Gallipoli, George had to give up the idea of university. Instead, he went rubber planting in Malaya for ten years, until the depression wiped out his plantation. After that it became a question, not of choosing a career, but of finding a job. In the end he had been only too happy to accept one as sampler here on the Gold Coast, the least healthy of the colonies. Things might have been different, thought George, if only he was good at games. For reasons which were never very clear to him, every colonial administrator had to be an athlete.

He paused for a moment at the foot of the ladderway, then began to climb with steady, mechanical strides. He climbed to the 2400 level without stopping, then waited for Kumosa, who was still far down the ladderway. George's chest ached slightly and the sweat rash in his groin stung like iodine in a wound. Leaning on the guard rail over the skidway, he looked down at Kumosa's lamp moving slowly up the steps. So much for their athletes, he thought grimly. There were damn few men of his age who could climb six hundred feet up a ladderway without pausing.

Kumosa reached the platform at last, breathing heavily and shaking his

head. "No be good," he panted. "You go humbug for here." He patted his chest, and George smiled as he waited for him to recover his breath. Kumosa leaned forward, ran his hand down his face and shook the sweat off. He opened the wooden ventilation door and George went through to the driveway, setting off between the rails again at a brisk pace. Just as he was about to turn off into the cross-cut leading to the stope he was heading for, Ankrah appeared, followed by the six boys in his sample gang.

"Finished already?" said George sarcastically. "It's only ten o'clock."

"We go finish um proper," Ankrah replied, obviously disconcerted.

"Let's go have a look. You weren't expecting me up at this end today,, were you?" George shone his light in Ankrah's face for a moment, then walked on down the cross-cut. He climbed up the short ladderway leading into the stope and flashed his light back and forth until the drills stopped. The stope formed a large, rectangular cave cut out of rock, two hundred feet high and a hundred and fifty long, but only about fifty inches wide. Fortunately the reef lay at an angle of about forty degrees, so that he was able to stand upright as he climbed up the short steel moils driven into the footwall. Four crews were drilling at the face, and after greeting the first, he shone his lamp on the reef. The chalk marks for the sampling had been drawn across the length of the reef at six foot intervals, but when George examined them closely he discovered they had barely been chipped. They were supposed to be gouged out with hammer and chisel to a depth of at least half an inch. The chips were collected in a pan and assayed to see how much gold they contained. George turned away with a sigh and looked down at Ankrah, who was just below.

"You call this proper?" he asked wearily. Ankrah was silent, and George told him to send his boys back up to do it again. As the sample gang began to climb up from the driveway below, the drill crews began to expostulate angrily. The boss boy came hopping and slithering down the stope to George, waving his arms and complaining bitterly he would never be able to finish drilling his rounds if they were stopped now.

"Ankrah do um proper first time, no be palaver," George shrugged, turning away and climbing up to a pillar some twenty feet back from the face. He shone his light on the hanging wall to make sure it was safe, then squatted down to wait patiently until the sampling had been done.

An hour and a half later he reached the shaft and sat on the wooden bench to wait for the skip. A new man was due on the afternoon train from Takoradi and George was going to the surface early to meet him. He took a long



swig of lime juice and wondered, as he handed the bottle back to Kumosa, what combination of circumstances could have directed anyone to this hot, damp and unpromising corner of the world. There was no depression now, and this lad Payne seemed to have the advantages George had lacked. He was a public school-boy, had been an officer in the war, yet he was coming out to work in a mine--in trade, as it were. Must be something wrong, George decided as the skip slowed to a stop in front of him and he prepared to climb into it. Perhaps he, too, was no good at games.

At the surface, George dropped into his office to check the mail before returning to his bungalow for a bath. It was the hottest part of the day and he stood for a moment by the window, enjoying the faint breeze as he looked out over the waste dump in the valley below. The ore cars from Kuni shaft swung slowly across the valley on their overhead cable, and at regular intervals the crash and rumble of the ore they tipped into the bin broke the heavy noonday silence. In another couple of months, he reflected gratefully, he would at least get away for a while--he would be on the boat, heading home for three months leave. He had intended to go to Italy this time, but an invitation arrived for him to stay with an old school friend. Puggy Farrer had gone into the Church. The living was a modest one, but he married into money and raised a family of four children in reasonable comfort. His youngest son had come out to the Coast a couple of months ago to work for Lever's in the cocoa business, and Puggy wrote to George, asking him to keep an eye on him if he could. George took the trouble to go down to Takoradi and meet the boy off the boat. He spent the day with him, offering him the best advice he could, then left him to his own devices.

The outcome had been an invitation to spend his leave at the vicarage in Limpsett, where there was still some good shooting. George hadn't seen the vicarage, but formed a mental picture of a kind of life to which he had been an alien since his father's death. He visualized himself scraping mud off his boots, going in to tea after a good day behind the dogs--perhaps four or five brace of partridge and a pheasant or two. A warm fire in the grate, a cultivated hostess behind her china and a sense of continuity. All the sons had left home, but he seemed to recall some mention, by the young man in Takoradi, of an unmarried sister. In his letter, Puggy dwelt enthusiastically on the virtues of a new pedigree black Labrador and the success of an experiment with Hungarian partridge in the hatchery.

George turned from the window as Amanquah, his African clerk, came in

with the mail. Amanquah's face was studiously blank and George sighed. Eight--no, it was more like ten years ago now, Amanquah had come to him with a mission school education, followed by three years in the Ashanti Rifles. He had worn his uniform when he applied for the job and George had liked the look of him. He was alert, quick to learn, and George had gradually come to rely on him a good deal--too much, perhaps. He could be trusted to interpret accurately when George found pigeon inadequate in his dealings with Africans, and as a worker he was the most intelligent and trustworthy native George had encountered. After four years as boss-boy of a sample gang, George had brought him into the office and trained him to do the office work, and even some of the administrative work.

Until quite recently, their relationship had been both pleasant and uncomplicated--very much that of a sergeant-major and a commanding officer. There had been a good deal of affection but never any familiarity. George would discuss personnel problems with him, but for the most part he allowed Amanquah to run the department. He was aware that Amanquah often took advantage of his position by accepting money to promote a candidate for a job, but since Amanquah was largely responsible for the boy's future conduct, he chose to ignore the fact. It was comforting to have at least one African on whom one could rely completely.

Then, about six months ago, a change became apparent. It was not a dramatic one to begin with; Amanquah merely began to offer advice before it was called for, and to contradict George on one or two occasions. George had questioned him about his change of attitude without getting any satisfaction and decided to ignore it, until one day Amanquah had suddenly appeared in the office wearing an electric-blue suit. His normal dress had always been a khaki shirt with black tie and khaki shorts worn with long black socks. George gazed at him in astonishment.

"What the hell are you doing in that ridiculous get-up?" he demanded.

"Sah?" Amanquah looked at him insolently.

"You no savvy? You want I talk pigeon?"

"No sah. I understand."

"Then what's the explanation for this fancy--for this zoot-suit you're wearing?"

"An African man can dress what he likes. We are not slaves, sah."

George felt himself colouring with anger. He waited for a moment or two to regain his composure. "Now Amanquah," he said carefully, "what's all

this bally palaver? You know perfectly well what people wear to work in these offices--Europeans as well as Africans. You can't come to work looking like something out of a comic opera--all same bazaar boy. And as for treating you like a slave, that's a lot of damned nonsense. So be a good fellow and go home and get changed."

George bent over his work, but soon looked up again, realizing that Amanquah hadn't moved. He was still standing in front of the desk with a look of mulish obstinacy on his face.

"Well?" said George sharply.

"It is not right. An African is fit to dress what clothes he likes." .

"Look here, my lad, if I have any more of this insolence, I'll be forced to sack you. Go home and get changed."

"No sah."

"What the devil d'you mean, no?"

"You no fit sack me. I am new president of A.M.U."

"A.M.U.? And what, may I ask, is that?"

"The African Mineworker's Union, sah." Amanquah's eyes glittered with triumph and George had to resist a surprisingly strong urge to get up and throw him out of the office bodily. He fiddled with his pencil for a moment. There had been rumours that an African union was being formed, but no one had taken them seriously because no one really believed that the Africans could organize themselves.

"I see," said George eventually. "Well, as far as I'm concerned, you have two week's pay instead of notice. I'll talk to the paymaster about it. In the meantime, I don't want to see you in this office again. We'll see what your union can do about that."

Amanquah had left the room smiling confidently; a jaunty clown in his bright blue suit. But George felt no inclination to laugh. He had been fond of Amanquah, and the speed with which he had changed proved so conclusively that they really were in for trouble with the Africans. At this, more than any other time in his career, George didn't want any trouble.

Less than a week later, however, Amanquah had returned--properly dressed this time--to plead for his job back. George unhesitatingly refused and to his consternation Amanquah burst into tears. There had followed a long, incoherent story of intrigue and treachery in the union which had resulted in Amanquah's loss of the presidency. Although he didn't say so in so many words, it was apparent to George that when he had appealed for help with his own

problems, he had been laughed at. The executive, such as it was, had no intention of lending support to individuals; they were after more money for themselves.

The temptation to tell him to get out had been almost irresistible; but Amanquah would be hard, perhaps impossible to replace, and finally George had reinstated him. The result had not been very satisfactory. Amanquah had done his job, but remained blank and withdrawn; there was no longer any sense of mutual confidence.

George took the letters from Amanquah. "Did you check to see what time the train's due in?"

"Is coming, sah."

George riffled through the letters and frowned. "Yes, I dare say. But I told you to check at one o'clock and see if it was running late."

George picked up the phone, asked for the station-master's office and learned that the train was forty minutes behind schedule. He put the phone down with a sigh. A few months ago Amanquah would have had somebody at the station reporting on the train's progress every fifteen minutes.

"Did you get a houseboy for the new massa?"

"Yes sah. He is come."

"Bring him in."

George examined the boy as he walked into the office. He was short, only a little over five feet, with an unusually flat face even for a negro. One eye was slightly out of true, which gave a faint impression of foxiness; but on the whole he looked clean and alert. George questioned him for a few minutes. His name was Amadou. He was a Fanti, and except for that George could find nothing wrong with him.

"All right." George stood up. "You go for station and wait for new massa. I go come small-small."

George was about to leave when Arthur Hutchinson put his head round the door. "Minute to spare?" he asked.

"Yes, of course, Arthur." George glanced at his watch. "But don't make it too long because I've got to meet this new chap off the train, and I haven't had my bath yet."

Arthur moved to a chair and sat down, watching George's lips carefully while he was speaking. He was a little deaf, and George, who always spoke quietly, disliked having to raise his voice. "Payne, you mean?" he asked, and George nodded. "Yes, looks promising. Dawson mentioned in his last letter

that he was very favourably impressed."

"Let's hope so," George replied dryly. "We've had enough disappointments in the last few years. What did you want to see me about?"

"I've just been looking at the assay summary for the last quarter. We're down some two hundred and eighty ounces on your forecast."

George frowned. "Well, you know the answer to that. I've been asking for more help for over a year now. Until I can get a couple of reliable people as supervisors, you'll go on getting these discrepancies. I know for a fact that some of the boss-boys don't go near the workings when they're sure I won't be around. They take samples from some old stope near the shaft and then sleep until it's time to come up. I caught Ankrah this morning. But I can't cover the entire mine every day, by myself."

"True. But there's more to it than that, isn't there? The assay values to the west have been deteriorating steadily for some time now."

George looked down at his desk. He should really take Arthur into his confidence, but he was hoping, when the new man came, to find time to have a good look round before he said anything. He spun the paper knife on his blotter. It ended up pointing neutrally at the door. "We do have a slight problem, of course," he admitted. "But if you'd trust me for a few months, Arthur. I need more time to work it out. Once this new fellow has found his feet...."

Arthur was looking uncomfortable and George spun the paper knife again, irritably. He knew just what was going on in his mind. Arthur didn't want to retire, and then find himself accused of concealing the fact that they were running out of ore reserves in order to make his final year an easy one. In the past he would have been as anxious as George to solve the problem without calling for assistance. Now, since he was probably anticipating a directorship, he was all caution.

"You must be aware that I'm hoping to take your place when you leave, Arthur," George went on. "And that it'll obviously be a big help if I can solve this problem myself."

"Of course I do. And I've done everything I can to make sure you do succeed me. But if your solution—whatever it is—doesn't pan out, I'm going to find myself in a very difficult position."

George glanced at his watch. "Can we have another chat about this later? I must go now. All I'm asking is that you leave it to me for another month or so. You can trust me not to embarrass you." He stood up. "After

all, I've got at least as much to lose as you have if I try to conceal a deterioration of ore reserves from London--and then don't come up with an answer."

Arthur sat for a moment or two longer without moving. "Okay, let's forget it until next month, anyway. Perhaps some new blood will make a difference. We've got another one coming out on the next boat--Liddell. He's had some training as a surveyor. But don't be too surprised if they get sent out prospecting as soon as they've got some idea of basic rock formations and what to look for. Hendrickson's pretty keen on this showing that's been reported up by Kolwesi."

"Lot of nonsense. It's much too early to start thinking of deserting the ship." George tried to speak with brisk assurance, but he felt resentful and insecure as he followed his superior through the door. Arthur Hutchinson's mild manner was deceptive; it concealed a shrewd and stubborn personality, and George wondered if he hadn't already begun to hedge against the future by dropping broad hints about the ore situation in his reports to head office. The brakes on his old Morris squealed as George wound his way down the hill to his bungalow. Everything seemed to be decaying or wearing out, he thought moodily. And fate was treating him with unreasonable severity. He had accepted his disappointments like a man, worked hard and conscientiously, yet now everything was turning sour. He had a bath and a sandwich, then drove down to the station. The train had lost more time since he had phoned. He had half an hour to kill, so he strolled across the road to have a chat with Vickers, the District Officer. But Vickers was interviewing a Syrian who had tried to bribe one of his staff, and he had a verandah full of Africans waiting to see him. George turned back and sat in the tin-roofed European waiting-room, sweating almost as heavily as he had underground.

The time passed slowly and George wondered why he bothered to come down and meet all his assistants. Nobody else ever did. During the war they had always proved disappointing: ill-mannered, lazy young louts with atrocious accents. None of them had any conception of how to handle Africans, invariably responded to his attempts to instruct them with unconcealed insolence. Perhaps things--surely things must improve now that the war was over. What a relief it would be if Payne turned out to be a gentleman; someone with whom he could feel at ease.

As the train finally pulled into the station, George went out onto the platform and found himself searching eagerly for the newcomer. Anson was the

only European and George breathed a sigh of relief as he spotted him leaning out of the window of his compartment. His face was unnaturally white—they always were, when they first arrived—but alert and confident. He disappeared for a few seconds behind the press of bodies as a crowd of piccanins fought with Amadou for possession of his luggage, then stepped clear and walked towards George. George had time to observe the three or four mammies widening their eyes and uttering exclamations of admiration before he shook hands with him.

"Hallo. I'm Pemberton."

"Nice of you to meet me, sir."

The crowd of small boys, shrieking abuse at each other, surrounded them. Three of them had a grip on one of Anson's suitcases and they were all pulling in different directions.

"How does one deal with this?" Anson asked.

"Do you have any pennies?"

"Yes, I think so." Anson pulled out a handfull of change.

"Well, take them and throw them as far along the platform as you can."

Anson glanced at George to see if he was serious, then did so. He stood for a moment with a smile on his face, watching them pile up in a shrieking mass, then turned back to George. Amadou collected up the two suitcases and stood waiting expectantly a few feet away.

"Er, this is your houseboy," said George. "His name's Amadou. I took the liberty of hiring him for you. It's a little difficult for someone who's just arrived to make a choice until he gets to know more about our friends. I hope you don't mind?"

"Not at all, sir. It's very kind of you to take the trouble." Anson turned to Amadou and held out his hand. George was on the point of stopping him, but decided Anson was the sort of person who could be trusted to shake hands with an African.

"Good. Well, I've got my car here, so let's take your luggage back to your mess. D'you have any more?"

"Yes, there's a trunk in the guard's van."

George turned to Amadou. "Make you go fetchum."

They stood talking about Anson's journey while they waited. Before long Amadou came past, the heavy tin trunk balanced on his head.

Anson smiled. "It's such an obvious way to carry things. But it looks wrong, somehow."

"Oh? I wonder why," George murmured politely. "Well, let's be on our way. I think it's late enough for me to offer you a beer without being accused of starting you on the road to ruin."

"Sounds a smashing idea." Anson bent down to pick up his suitcases, but this time George did stop him. "Better leave them for your boy," he said dryly. "He'll be watching you pretty carefully to see how much he can get away with. They're like children, y'know."

Anson put them down and followed George to the car, looking a little guilty as Amadou passed them again, sweat coursing down his face. They drove up to Anson's mess, unloaded the luggage and then went on down the road to George's bungalow. George shouted for his boy to bring two beers and they sat down in ugly but surprisingly comfortable cane chairs on the verandah overlooking the nine-hole golf course in the valley below.

"My word, that looks pleasant," said Anson. "Won't be long before I'm down there."

"Are you good at games?"

"Not particularly. But good enough to enjoy them. They told me you had tennis courts and a cricket pitch as well. It's one of the things that attracted me when I applied for the job."

George studied him curiously. He looked athletic: tall, with good shoulders and an easy stride when he walked. He was not strikingly good-looking, but he had firm, pleasant features and spoke with an impeccable accent. What on earth had made him decide on this job? Must be some shortcomings which would become apparent later.

"Do you have any background in geology?" he asked, pouring his beer into his glass.

"None at all, I'm afraid."

"Yes, well that won't matter much to begin with--I'll give you some books to read. You'll be accompanying me for a few days, while I show you how to find your way around the mine. Then you'll be on your own, supervising the sample gangs. Nothing complicated--I'll explain to you what's required. It's simply a question of not being able to trust boys to work without supervision."

"So I've heard. Aren't there any reliable ones?"

"Not in my experience. Cheers!" George took a long drink and licked his lips thoughtfully. "Sometimes they seem to be for so long that you almost become persuaded. But in the end they always let you down. I hope you won't



be offended if I offer you some advice on how to handle them?"

"Not at all. I shall be very grateful, sir."

George looked at Anson with more approval than he had bestowed on any of his subordinates for a very long time. "It's such a pleasure to meet a young man who has the good manners to call one sir, again. During the war we've had to put up with some very scruffy characters out here. Conscription-dodgers, most of them."

Anson coloured slightly, but made no attempt to reply. "The best way to treat Africans is like children," George continued. "Because that's what they are. Have a joke with them by all means, but never let them become too familiar. They'll try to, of course; and if they think you're at all soft, they'll make your life a misery. Don't hesitate to call them out if they go too far. Punish them if necessary, but whatever you do, don't go back on your word." He paused and smiled briefly. "Some of your recent predecessors appeared to find my methods a trifle ridiculous, I'm afraid. But in my opinion, there's no substitute for firmness when dealing with an African. He respects you first of all for your integrity, and secondly for your self-discipline—neither of which he possesses. So what it boils down to, really, is that you mustn't let yourself go in the tropics. Dress with the same care as you would at home, and make sure you don't drink too much. And if that sounds like the advice of an old fogey, it's still the best I can offer you."

Anson was listening attentively and George experienced a remarkable sense of well-being. He was speaking well, he felt, to someone who both understood and appreciated what he was saying. He paused to look out over the golf course and suddenly an astonishing idea came into his mind. For the blink of an eye he found himself wishing that Anson was his son. He had never allowed himself to think of marriage and a family before because of what he considered his failure, and because of the climate. But now he examined the idea with interest. He was almost bound to become general manager of the mine, in which case a wife would be a distinct advantage. A more detailed picture of the advantages was just beginning to form in his mind when he became aware that Anson was waiting for him to resume.

"Ah—why don't we have another beer," he said, shouting for Somu, his houseboy. "Then I expect you'd like to get back and have a bath."

"I can certainly do with one."

George looked at his watch as Somu collected the empty bottles from

the table between them. "Perhaps I can pick you up around six and take you up to the club for a gin. Meet some of the chaps."

"Thank you very much. I'd like that."

The beer arrived and they sat drinking it without speaking for some time.

"Are you engaged, or anything of that sort?" George asked in the end, a little more abruptly than he had intended.

Anson smiled and shook his head. "No, I don't think I'd have chosen the white man's grave if I were."

"Oh, that's all in the past now. If you take your Paludrine regularly you won't have any fever. It was different when I first came out--dengue, blackwater, yellow fever--no end to it. But now it's so safe the wives can come out. We've got seven of them here."

"No single girls, I suppose?"

"'Fraid not." George fingered his moustache and looked at Anson with a faint twinkle in his eye. "Can be a problem, of course. Healthy young fellows, and no women. Fact is, it's pretty well an accepted custom to, ah, to you-know-what with a native girl. Just make sure she's clean."

"None of the ones I've seen so far look very seductive."

George let out a grunt of amusement. "You'll be surprised how they can change. Look positively white after a few months." He swilled the last of his beer around in his glass for a moment and studied it. "No, this can be a very pleasant life for a young man if he keeps a firm grip on himself. I always remember my grandfather's advice to me when I first came out to the tropics. Sounds frightfully stuffy and Victorian now, but it's still perfectly valid. 'Put your faith in God,' he said, 'honour the King and keep your bowels open...and you won't come to very much harm.'"

George saw that Anson was regarding him with a curious intentness. He had obviously been impressed by what he had heard. "Well," he concluded, putting down his empty glass, "you won't mind strolling back to your mess, will you? It's only a five minute walk."

Anson stood up. "No, of course not; and thank you very much for the drink." He walked towards the verandah steps, then paused. "Oh, incidentally sir--what should I wear to the club?"

George's eyes gleamed with pleasure. There was no longer any doubt that Anson was sound. It was a delight to have somebody at last who appreciated the importance of dressing correctly. Nearly all the people who had come out

before him were thoroughly sloppy. The sort of people who would sit down to a meal in their messes with nothing but a towel round their loins--and then wonder why the Africans had no respect for them.

"Shorts and an open-neck shirt will do. After dinner, slacks and a tie. We don't bother much with jackets in this climate."

"Right. Then I'll see you at six o'clock. And thank you again for the drink."

George stood at the verandah rail, watching his straight back as he walked away down the dusty red road. He felt invigorated, more cheerful than he had for some time. Perhaps now that the war was over they would start getting more people like Anson. They were going to need them if the Africans really did act up.

### CHAPTER 3

Anson tapped the sugar bowl with his knife. The three ants in it exploded into a frenzy of activity, scuttling about like figures in a silent film. One of them scrambled to the lip of the bowl, fell off, and hurried across the table towards him. He bent his knife against his forefinger and flicked the ant into the beam of sunlight shining across the room as Henry Fuller pulled his chair up to the table. Anson disliked breakfast more than any other time of the day. By then the sun had already begun to dispel any hope of comfort, and he could feel the first faint trickle of sweat under his arms. But it wasn't only the heat, it was the sensation he experienced every morning of being at once hemmed in yet curiously isolated. If no one spoke the silence depressed him; if they talked he became unreasonably irritated.

Henry cleared his throat as he sat down, a thick, glutinous sound which Anson knew would be repeated every two or three minutes throughout the meal. He shifted in his chair and fiddled with his knife. Henry was the timekeeper, a thin, dry little man who always made Anson think of a very old newspaper which would crumble if you touched it. He had no ideas of his own and his only social contribution would be an occasional seedy complaint tossed into the arguments that flared up almost constantly between Anson and Charles Liddell, the other occupant with whom they shared the mess. Most of Henry's life, Anson discovered from a series of disconnected conversations, had been spent in the oilfields of Venezuela, and he would sometimes talk of Maracaibo when he was drunk. But his descriptions were so inadequate, the events he spoke of so inconsequential, that no picture emerged and he would usually end up muttering to himself. Anson found him enormously depressing. He could never remember what he looked like when he wasn't actually looking at him.

It was this that made him so much part of the curious air of unreality about the mornings, Anson reflected, as Henry cleared his throat again. There was more than a touch of Kafka about them. Every morning he felt he might easily

open his eyes to discover that some frightening transformation had taken place. There was something wrong with the quality of the sunlight and the appearance of the little cone-shaped hills he could see through the double doors at one end of the mess; hills that changed from green to blue, and then dissolved into a grey nothingness in the distance. No wind stirred the trees to life; smoke climbed straight into the sky like a thin cable of blue wire. All the early morning sounds—the cries of children, the barking of dogs, the slamming of doors, even the wail of the six o'clock siren—they all died away quickly, and only a faint ringing emptiness lingered.

Anson grimaced to himself and sat up, glancing at his watch, then at Liddell who was fiddling idly with his knife and fork. Breakfast was nearly ten minutes late again, but Anson decided to wait a minute or two longer before complaining. Charles Liddell had arrived on the mine three weeks after Anson. He had come straight from a Middlesex grammar school and two years apprenticeship in a county surveyor's office. He was a fresh-complexioned youth with a bony face over which the skin seemed to have been stretched a little too tightly. He was the most obstinate man Anson had ever met and when they became involved in an argument a white spot would spread across the bridge of his nose while the rest of his face glowed with passionate conviction.

Anson wished he could ignore him as he did Henry, but this was impossible because he and Charles were inevitable competitors. Liddell was the son of a cabinet maker in Hendon, and right from the start had set out to prove himself superior to Anson, both professionally and socially. There was no doubt that Anson was winning, and although he kept telling himself it was beneath his dignity to become involved in a petty struggle for prestige with a man who, as the doctor put it, spoke in the accents of a South-London tennis club, the truth was that he enjoyed it. Each small victory pushed back for a little while the feeling of hollowness that was growing on him as the months rolled by.

But in any case, it made no difference what he felt because his confidence and his success in dealing with the Africans was bound to provoke Liddell's jealousy. Anson never resorted to the deliberate change of tone and expression Charles always assumed when he spoke to an African—a sort of condescending readjustment which they resented fiercely. And this was the issue between them at the moment. Each month one of them would be responsible for the catering on the mess. Last month had been Anson's turn as Chopmaster and they had eaten both well and inexpensively. The bill at the end of the month had come to a

little over twelve pounds for each of them. At least two of these twelve pounds, as Anson knew very well, had gone straight into the servant's pockets. But the knowledge caused him no distress because he recognised it as an accepted custom; a very practical one in which the African enjoyed the sensation of having outwitted the white man and the white man suffered no inconvenience since the salaries allowed for it. Liddell, however, failed to see it in this light. He regarded it as both inefficient and degrading, and he had set out to institute a single-handed reform of the system. No sooner had he taken over from Anson as Chopmaster for the month, than he declared his intention to reduce the bills and put things on a more businesslike footing. Anson made a half-hearted attempt to dissuade him, but Liddell looked at him so contemptuously that he abandoned the attempt and left him to find out the hard way.

The houseboy appeared at last, walking up the steps with a tray, and Anson smiled to himself at the deliberately bland expression on his face. The lateness was patently calculated. The boy put a paw-paw down in front of him, and Anson looked at him ironically.

"What's this?"

"Be paw-paw, massa."

"Take it away."

"Massa?"

Anson reached up suddenly, seized the boy by the ear and pulled his head down. "I said take it away, you deaf bastard!" he bellowed.

The boy stepped back as Anson released his ear. He stood rubbing it and trying not to grin. "No be good palaver, massa," he complained. "I go sick for head."

Bunching his fist, Anson held it up under the boy's nose. "If you ever bring me another flaming paw-paw for breakfast, Amadou," he said amiably, "you'll be sick for your bloody nose as well--savvy? Now go and get me a grapefruit, one time!"

"No be grapefruit, massa."

"Why not?"

"Me no savvy. Be cook palaver."

"Make you go fetchum."

The boy shrugged faintly and stole an interested glance at Liddell as he walked across the room to the door. They sat in silence for a few moments until the cook appeared. He was about fifty years old, a clean, gleaming

Negro whose crinkly black hair had just begun to turn grey. His face was very nearly as round as a football and when he grinned his teeth flashed like a lighthouse on a dark night. He had been cook on this particular mess for the past eighteen years and as a rule took a fatherly interest in his young employers. When Anson visited the club for the first time on a Saturday night, he had missed his dinner, and found one of the cook's sons waiting on the steps to accompany him home when he left. It was a precaution the cook took after one newcomer drank too much on his first night several years ago, and fell off the path along the side of the hill to lie in the bushes for the rest of the night with a broken ankle. Anson had been touched when he heard this. He thanked the cook and gave his son a shilling for his pains. The result was a friendship, but a qualified friendship with clearly defined limits, so that Anson's tenure as Chopmaster the previous month had been singularly undemanding—a question of general preferences in food rather than any detailed instructions, of an acceptable expenditure rather than any detailed accounting. These were small enough circumstances, but sufficient to make Liddell's parsimonious approach all the more obnoxious to the servants, who, like children summing up a new and inexperienced teacher, set out to undermine him.

"Morning, Obang," Anson greeted him conversationally. "D'you get any last night?"

The cook's smile, a trifle apprehensive at first because he had not expected to have to deal with Anson, relaxed under the influence of Anson's familiar ribaldry. "Plenty too much, massa," he beamed. "Two time."

Anson clicked his tongue admiringly. "Both wives, eh? Lucky old bastard." He glanced at Liddell, chuckling to himself at the expression of disapproval on his face. "Or perhaps," he went on, turning back to the cook, "perhaps you sneaked off down to the compound and nailed some innocent young mammy? You're a dirty old man, Obang, with an astonishingly appropriate name."

"No be so, massa. Me number one Christian."

"You're a number one bloody old heathen," Anson replied pleasantly.

"And now you can go and fetch me a grapefruit."

The cook's smile faded. "No catchem, massa."

"Why the hell not?"

The cook looked hopefully at Liddell, but Liddell was eating his paw-paw with dour concentration. "Massa Liddy say him cost too much."

Anson looked at Liddell in surprise. "Is this true?" he demanded.

"Yes," he replied indifferently.

"For...!" Anson checked himself and turned to the cook. "Okay, Obang. You win this time. But if you don't serve me a grapefruit tomorrow morning...."

"Massa, be Chopmaster palaver...."

"Get out," Anson roared suddenly, and the cook turned away with the ghost of a smile on his lips. Waiting for him to leave the room, Anson spotted the houseboy peering over the top of the steps, grinning. His head disappeared abruptly as he caught Anson's eye.

"Now, what's the score?" Anson asked quietly, looking across the table at Liddell. "You know perfectly well I can't stand paw-paw, and that I always have grapefruit in the morning...and in any case, why didn't you say something when I sent for the cook?"

"You didn't ask me. I'm Chopmaster this month, and I'm the one who's supposed to be dealing with the cook—not you."

"I see. But that doesn't answer my first question—why no grapefruit?"

"Because, as I told you before, I've decided to cut down on the chop bill this month."

"Bully for you. But this happens to be a mess...."

"Exactly. And we didn't see any reason why we should be forced to subsidize your extravagance."

"We! So you've discussed it with Henry? And why not with me?"

Henry cleared his throat. "The chop bill was too high last month," he said petulently.

"It was twelve guineas. Correct me if I'm wrong, but you were Chopmaster before me and I seem to recall your bill came to just under fourteen quid."

"We did a lot of entertaining that month," Henry mumbled.

"You didn't even bother checking the cook's accounts every day, did you?" Liddell broke in.

"No, I didn't," Anson agreed. "I added them up at the end of the month and then knocked off a fiver. He argued for a bit and then gave it up. We were both satisfied."

"Yes, well it's going to be more than a fiver this month. I'm going to stop these coons robbing us blind."

Anson sat looking at him for a moment, then shook his head and sighed. "Amadou," he shouted mildly.



"Massa?" The voice was nicely pitched. There was just the faintest inflection of irony in his answering shout.

"Make you bring chop, one time!"

"Yo massa."

None of them spoke for several minutes after their breakfast had been served. Anson was not surprised to find fried Spam instead of bacon with his eggs. He ate it without comment. By the look of mulish obstinacy on Liddell's face he knew that it was pointless to try to reason with him. Liddell would probably end up by backing himself into a corner and trying to sack the cook. Then the management would intervene and Liddell would be the laughing stock of all the Africans on the mine. Anson lit a cigarette, left the table and told Amadou to bring him another cup of tea in his room.

When Amadou brought the tea there was a note with it from George Pemberton asking him to come down to his bungalow a few minutes earlier than usual.

"Tosa go come?" he asked.

"Him no be here."

"Well, when he does get here, tellum go for Massa Spencer's bungalow and fetchum magnifying glass."

"I go tellum, massa."

"You savvy magnifying glass?"

Amadou looked at Anson, then looked away again. "Me no savvy."

"How you go tellum if you no savvy?"

The boy shifted his feet and smiled meaninglessly. Anson sighed and told him to pass his pad and pencil from the table. The small ten-power glass he used for examining his rock specimens had disappeared a few days previously. To the Africans it was an irresistible toy and Anson had been tempted to sack Tosa, the boy who carried his equipment and accompanied him everywhere he went underground. It was the third one he had lost in as many months. But as always, there had been no way of fixing the blame. When the first one had disappeared Tosa had suggested that he should keep the new one with him all the time, instead of returning it to the bungalow with the rest of Anson's equipment every day. He had dropped very obvious hints about Amadou.

Anson took the pad Amadou brought him, scribbled a note to Spencer asking for another glass, and paused before handing it to the boy. "You speak true?" he asked casually.

"Massa?"

"You're a lying black son of a Togoland bazaar mammy," Anson went on conversationally. "You savvy too bloody much what a magnifying glass is."

"Ah, no be so, massa. Me no...."

"Shut up and listen to me. The next time you go lose um, you go pay, savvy? Five shilling for you—five shilling for Tosa."

"Massa, no be good palaver...."

"Give this to Tosa," Anson interrupted, handing him the note. "And don't forget to put a towel in my chop bag today."

Amadou was about to renew the argument, then thought better of it and shuffled off. Anson finished his tea, picked up his tin of cigarettes and set off for George's bungalow. Life seemed to be narrowing down to one long argument, he reflected bitterly. If you weren't arguing with Liddell, you were always arguing with or complaining about the Africans. He had been so sanctimonious about Liddell trying to stop them stealing, yet five minutes later he was doing precisely the same thing. And the trouble was they had you by the balls. They could always accuse each other, looking sad or contemptuous or sullen as you ranted at them. It was like a little, futile guerrilla war, constantly waged, in which neither side ever had a decisive victory. Anson prided himself that the Africans respected him, but they stole just as much off him as they did off Liddell.

He looked up to see George Pemberton out in his garden. George was plucking dead leaves from the cannas which lined his driveway. He flicked a beetle out onto the path with his foot and trod on it conscientiously.

"Morning," he greeted Anson. "'Fraid we'll have to walk--flat battery."

Anson shrugged and they set off down the road, turning off onto the path that wound round the hill to the shaft. George was preoccupied and Anson thoroughly irritable. The sweat had broken out already under his bush-shirt. He wished he could afford a car of his own, realizing peevishly that he could if he cut down his booze bill at the club for a couple of months. They rounded a corner and came on two African women with bundles on their heads. One of them was standing at the side of the path, legs straddled, one hand under her mammy-cloth to hook her G-string out of the way as she relieved herself. She looked at them unself-consciously as they passed.

"Must be some significance to that," Anson remarked. "The order is reversed. Here, the men squat down to have a piss and the women stand up."

George glanced at him, his expression a mixture of indifference and

disapproval. Anson wondered why he had said it to him. He should have kept it for Reggie, who would turn it into an entertaining anthropological theory. But Anson was aware, with a pang of distaste, that the sight had excited him. There was something peculiarly smutty about being excited by the sight of a woman urinating.

"Where does that lead to?" he asked, as they came abreast of an old footpath branching into the undergrowth on their left.

"A ventilation shaft that was shut down years ago."

"Have we got time to have a look?"

George shrugged. "If you like. There's nothing to see. Just a big hole in the ground."

They pushed through the bushes for a few yards and Anson was startled to discover how large the shaft was. It must have been at least forty feet across. He tested the barrier of rotten wood round it, then tried to lean over far enough to look down it. He could see a faint gleam of water on grey rock about twenty feet down, then nothing but an ominous blackness.

"Bit creepy, isn't it?" he said, drawing back.

"Hm. They shut it down after a big cave-in. One of the pillars in a stope let go and about thirty coons were trapped."

"Did they get them out?"

"No. They're still down there."

Anson gazed at the hole for a moment. There was something fascinating about it. "Curious. I feel I want to go down it for some reason."

"We'd better get a move on," said George. "It's nearly quarter past seven." He looked at Anson speculatively as they walked back to the main footpath. "As a matter of fact, you may get an opportunity to go down it before long. We want to check the reef at this end--and this may be the only way to get to it."

Anson laughed. "I didn't really mean it. It gives me the screamers."

## CHAPTER 4

Kwotze offered the stranger his only chair, walked across the room to turn up the wick on the kerosine lamp, then sat down on his bed and looked at him expectantly.

"My name is Baku," said the stranger. "Baku Oro...and I was seeing you in courthouse today. Why you go make palaver for white man?"

Kwotze blinked in surprise. So he was one of them. A policeman sent to warn him that if he made any more trouble he would be sent to prison.

"Is not your palaver," he snapped, standing up. "Make you go now. You no savvy this palaver atall...."

"Sit down," said Baku, smiling approvingly as he took out a flat tin of cigarettes and offered one to Kwotze. "We must be talking. I was in courthouse too this day, after holding meetings for United Gold Coast Convention. Police, they say this meetings illegal--I go for jail next time. My case is come after you finishing. You savvy United Convention?"

"Yo," said Kwotze uncertainly, accepting the cigarette and walking across to pick up the lamp. They lit their cigarettes and Kwotze studied Baku warily. It could be a trick. Perhaps they suspected he belonged to the Convention already, that his sudden decision to challenge the colour bar in the bank that morning was premeditated. He drew on the cigarette gratefully. It was more than a week since he had been able to afford one. "Why you come for see me?" he asked.

Baku spread his hands out. "We are needing mens like you. Now we are working for independence. I am secretary United Convention. I come see you for join."

Kwotze rubbed his nose for a moment with the palm of his hand, then shook his head and laughed. "I am thinking you be police, come for make palaver. Yo, I am fit to join. I am wanting this thing long time."

"Is good. You have been to school, yes?"

"I am finishing grade six."

Baku nodded and began to explain what the United Convention was trying

to do. He stayed for more than an hour, growing more and more animated as he unfolded their plans for independence. There was to be a meeting two evenings hence. Dr. Danquah would be there and they were going to organize a rally in the bazaar on Saturday. He invited Kwotze to attend, hinted strongly that he might be acceptable as a member of the action committee. After he left Kwotze flopped down on his bed, a little breathless at the exciting new horizons which had suddenly opened up before him. This must be it, he thought happily; the change of luck for which he had waited so long; the beginning, at any rate, of an opportunity to repay all the insults he'd suffered since he was dragged off to school when he was ten years old.

Turning his head on the soiled pillow to watch a moth circling tirelessly round the lamp, he was surprised to discover that the hated features of the Reverend Mr. Collinson had all but faded from memory. But the humiliation hadn't. As the eldest son of a village headman, with every reason to believe he would succeed his father when he died, Kwotze had never even thought about school until his father was arrested. Nor did he ever discover exactly what his father was supposed to have done. But one day the police came and took him away, Kwotze's mother went back to her own village in the bush, and Kwotze was sent to a mission school in Accra. He tried to run away several times, but it was no good; they always caught him and brought him back, sulky and defiant. Throughout his six years there he endured one punishment after another for what the Reverend Mr. Collinson and his wife called insolence, until, just before Kwotze's seventeenth birthday, Collinson finally lost his temper for the last time, slapped his face and expelled him.

Too restless to lie still for long, Kwotze got up off the bed and walked over to the window, wishing he had enough money to go to the beer hall. But he owed the money lender in the bazaar three shillings and the remaining seven would barely be enough to provide food for the next fortnight. He leaned out of the window and sniffed hungrily at the smell of woodsmoke, of evening meals being cooked. He was sick of having to make do with a spoonful of curried fish and a dab of cassava eaten off a banana leaf in the bazaar. A family of four or five was squatting round a small fire on the pavement opposite him, eating their supper. Wistfully he recalled the time when he could afford to go up to a group like that, pay for a meal and eat as much as he liked. The irony of it was that he had been able to do just that immediately after his expulsion from mission school.

Because what he learned so reluctantly during those six years turned

turned out to be surprisingly helpful. Some curious motive had induced Collinson to give him a recommendation and he got a job almost at once as a stock clerk in one of the two UAC stores in Accra. His task was to keep inventory, moving slowly between the shelves, counting, making entries on his list, dreaming of owning a store of his own one day. For nearly six months he was able to steal practically everything he needed, leaving the five pounds they paid him every month to be spent on entertainment. He could afford to dress well, drink palm wine and beer at the weekends, have a girl two or three times a week. He decided to get married as soon as he could find a suitable wife; it would be a saving in the long run. He was very happy during those few months. His bitterness over the loss of his inheritance gradually faded; Accra had a good deal to offer that he would never have found in his village, even as headman. He was confident he was going to do well for himself. And so he might have if he hadn't grown careless. But he did, and one day he found a hand on his arm just as he was about to slip a tin of prawns into his pocket.

"I thought as much," said the manager, looking at him sardonically. "And I said so when your precious padre was persuading me to give you a job. Never fails--hire anyone with a mission school education, and you can bet your life you've got a thief on your hands."

Kwotze's temper flared. He wasn't stealing; he was merely taking what he should be entitled to. "What you expecting?" he snarled back. "You pay me five pound--how much moneys you go catch, huh?"

"Never mind what my salary is, you insolent little bastard." The manager snatched the tin out of his hand, threw it back on the shelf. Kwotze tried to pull his arm free, but the manager was too quick for him. He twisted Kwotze's arm behind his back, marched him across the shop and out onto the verandah, then put a foot in his back and sent him flying down the short flight of steps to pitch headlong into the dusty road. There were a lot of people outside the front of the store. They stopped, turned to stare at him in surprise, then burst out laughing. Kwotze picked himself up, saw an African constable on the other side of the road and ran across to him, almost incoherent with rage as he shouted at him to arrest the manager for assault. The constable laughed in his face, and when Kwotze persevered, threatened to arrest him for disturbing the peace.

Funny thing, he thought, rubbing his nose. He had sworn to kill that constable one day, yet now he could hardly remember what he looked like. There had been so many others since then; so many officious swine who sold themselves

to the white man. He had defied them and their white masters so uncompromisingly that in the end he could no longer find work with a European firm. He was determined not to become a labourer, to work on the docks or go down the mines, so the only alternative had been to go and work for Syrians who knew precisely how much he stole and paid him accordingly. In many ways it was even more humiliating than working for the English; but for nearly twelve years now he had had to put up with it, growing more and more bitter as time passed.

Kwotze turned from the window and went back to his bed. He lay with his hands behind his head, gazing up at the smoky ceiling, convinced that destiny must have taken a hand in his affairs at last. It must have been something more than a simple impulse that stirred in him at the bank this morning; and the fact that Baku was in court when he appeared must surely have been more than a pure coincidence. Luxurious daydreams began to drift through his mind. A cupboard full of new clothes, cigarettes, bottles of whiskey on the table, a motor-bike, perhaps even a car. People would defer to him as they had to his father. It was a long time before he fell asleep.

Yet after the first one or two meetings, Kwotze's initiation into the United Gold Coast Convention proved a thoroughly discouraging experience. For a day or two, the long meetings in which they discussed plans to throw the British out and take over their own country filled him with a heady excitement; but soon he began to discover that the Convention did very little but talk. The famous Dr. J.B. Danquah he'd heard so much about turned out to be a cruel disappointment. He was as pompous and patronizing as the Europeans, totally lacking in the sort of militancy Kwotze craved for. He spoke of evolution instead of revolution. He had no intention of risking any charges of sedition, of allowing himself to be jailed for the cause. He was, in Kwotze's eyes, that most contemptible of all people, a moderate.

Then one evening a tall stranger with oddly prominent eyes suddenly appeared at one of their meetings. Baku, who worked for the railways, had been transferred to Kumasi, and the stranger came to replace him as secretary. His credentials were impressive: he had studied in America and England, held degrees from real universities, spoke English fluently, and made his presence felt so effortlessly that Danquah appeared uneasy. Kwotze studied him for a week or two, came to the conclusion he had found a kindred spirit and decided to launch an appeal for action instead of words at their next meeting. He demanded strikes and boycotts, riots if necessary; spoke with a passionate conviction which

obviously impressed the new secretary. Afterwards, and in private, they had a long conversation.

Kwotze's optimism blossomed afresh. They were in complete accord about the necessity for a new and much more vigorous movement, and the secretary made no bones about his determination to wrest the leadership of the Convention from Danquah. But he warned Kwotze that he had a great deal to learn if he wanted to join him.

"I learn plenty too much," Kwotze assured him fervently. "You fit teach me, I go work night all same day."

"All right," the secretary agreed. "You'd better give up your job and come to work for the Convention full time. There'll be a row, of course--they're a little scared of you already, but I'll fix that."

But once again Kwotze was in for a sharp disappointment. It was school all over again, with all its tedium. He was expected to sit still for hours and do nothing but listen. And he discovered that he needed an entire new vocabulary. Bitterly he regretted his refusal to learn to speak and write English properly at mission school. At the time it had seemed a creditable gesture of defiance; now he realized what a mistake he'd made as he struggled to comprehend new ideas and concepts. Balance of power, spheres of influence, imperialism, unilateral decisions...the very sound of the phrases made him dizzy. He tried to understand what a dialectic was, to appreciate why he should distinguish between a class struggle and a racial one. The secretary spoke of people Kwotze had never heard of: Machiavelli, Rousseau, Thomas Paine, Lenin. He read long passages out of Karl Marx, then explained them to him in Fanti, and Kwotze grew more and more impatient. Socialism and Communism struck him as ridiculous; he had no time for the common man. It was the people like himself who were willing to work, take risks, die if necessary, who would be the rulers once they achieved independence—not the spineless majority who kow-towed to the white man. But he kept these thoughts to himself, for he quickly discovered that the secretary was a domineering individual, far more inclined to instruct him than to debate with him.

And no matter how much he resented Kwame Nkrumah's arrogance, Kwotze was bound to admit he was an invaluable man to have as a leader. He had some quality not easy to put into words, some force which compelled people to listen to him when he spoke, to obey when he commanded. More importantly, though, as far as Kwotze was concerned, was his desire for action. He knew the history of revolutions, the tactics and strategies which made them succeed or fail, and



he had no timid reservations about violence. First, the old hierarchy of chiefs would have to go, the cautious moderates like Danquah swept aside. Their strength as a movement, he kept reminding Kwotze, would come from the newly educated Africans—the "grade seven boys," he called them—and from the ex-servicemen who had been abroad and seen how underprivileged they were compared to other people. All they needed were leaders strong enough to fuse this dissatisfaction into an active force against the British; leaders who could persuade them not only to join the independence movement, but to fight as well, and to provide the money they needed to set up an effective organization.

This was the sort of instruction Kwotze could understand, and although he was beginning to dislike Nkrumah as a person more every day, he was glad he'd had the sense to join forces with him. Within three months Nkrumah posed an unmistakable threat to Danquah for the leadership of the Convention, and Kwotze found himself elevated to a position of growing authority. Watching Nkrumah carefully when he was addressing an audience, Kwotze quickly picked up the little tricks of public speaking: the series of questions which brought a chanting response, each one more vehement than the last; the sneering references to African timidity, followed at once by a bellowed affirmation of unity and strength. In a surprisingly short time Kwotze began to experience the intoxicating thrill of working a crowd up into a frenzy. He too had a gift. Almost anything, he began to feel, was within his powers. He was gathering his own following, and the larger it grew the more he resented Nkrumah's patronizing manner. What difference, when it came down to it, did all his education make? It was one's ability to sway crowds that mattered, and in that respect he was clearly Nkrumah's equal. Often now he found an excuse to cut short the interminable lectures on economics and political science. That could all come later. And he noticed that Nkrumah never congratulated him when he came back from a successful meeting—on the contrary, he seemed to resent the fact and went out of his way to prevent Kwotze from holding them. They began to fall out more and more frequently, but Kwotze was determined not to be treated like a lackey ever again.

Then one night disaster nearly overtook him. He had grown careless again, overlooking what he realized afterwards were obvious signs of trouble. To begin with, he should have suspected something when Nkrumah invited him to address a meeting after he had delivered his own speech. Instead, Kwotze took it as a peace offering, and agreed. The authorities always insisted that the

Convention must obtain permits for all their meetings now. As secretary, it was Nkrumah's responsibility to get them, and he had always done so in the past. So there was no reason for Kwotze to suspect that he hadn't on this occasion as he accompanied him to the empty warehouse down on the docks where they were holding the meeting. He noticed, as he walked into the building, that there seemed to be more police around than usual, but took it merely as an encouraging sign that the authorities were becoming more concerned about their activities. He sat down confidently with two other committee members behind Nkrumah as he began to speak, rehearsing what he was going to say when his turn came.

Kwotze rubbed his nose in surprise as he saw the European, all by himself in the front row. He was chubby and middle-aged, perfectly at ease as he gazed up at them. Kwotze was accustomed to seeing white policemen standing at the back of the hall taking notes while he was addressing an audience, but there was something peculiarly disconcerting about this solitary individual sitting right in front of them, surrounded by Africans yet perfectly composed. And then, while he was studying the European, he became aware that Nkrumah had abandoned his normal tactics. Instead of beginning in a quiet, reasonable voice, as he usually did, he was whipping the crowd up at once, bellowing rhetorical questions at them, waving his arms passionately as he urged them to respond. The noise in the corrugated iron building grew deafening within a matter of moments; then, just as it reached a crescendo, Nkrumah suddenly stepped back and gestured to Kwotze to take over. Kwotze sat for a few seconds, too surprised to move.

"Come on, you fool," Nkrumah snarled, catching him by the shoulder and dragging him to his feet. "Don't lose them. Keep them going!"

Kwotze stumbled forward, threw up his arms and desperately shouted the first slogan that came into his head. But the rhythm had been destroyed, the crowd responded raggedly, and before he had time to say any more the police came pouring into the building. He turned in dismay to see that they were coming in behind him, too. After a long rumble of anger, silence fell on the crowd. They were so quiet that the tramp of the European policeman's boots on the wooden floor as he walked towards the platform seemed to ring out like gunshots.

He stepped up onto it and looked at them for a moment with a blank face. "Do you people have a permit to hold this meeting?" he asked.

Kwotze turned to look at Nkrumah and his heart sank as he saw him hold out his hands in a gesture of apology. Kwotze's probation didn't expire for another two months. If he was arrested now he would certainly go to prison.

Nkrumah would only be bound over. In his rage, Kwotze clenched his teeth so hard a stab of pain shot up the side of his face. It was a set-up; Nkrumah had purposely failed to obtain a permit, deliberately handed the meeting over to Kwotze just as he knew the police were bound to make their move.

"An accident," said Nkrumah blandly. "We forgot."

"In which case, I'm afraid I shall have to arrest the four of you for holding an illegal meeting. You know perfectly well...."

"Mind if I put in a word?"

They all turned to look at the European who had been sitting by himself. He had stepped up onto the platform unnoticed and was standing just behind Kwotze, his brown eyes gleaming with interest.

"D'you mind telling me who you are first?" the policeman demanded, obviously as disconcerted as the rest of them.

"My name's Thornton. I'm the mine doctor at Kuwassi. Just dropped in to see what all the palaver's about."

"And what did you want to say?"

"You'll probably regard it as a gross impertinence on my part to offer advice...but I don't think you should arrest them, because that's just exactly what they want you to do. Remember what happened with Gandhi? We arrested him and he became a national hero."

The policeman looked at the doctor uncertainly. He didn't seem to be able to make up his mind whether to resent the intrusion or not. "I daresay," he replied eventually. "But these people are breaking the law."

"Surely a rather technical breach, isn't it?"

"Perhaps...but that's beside the point."

"Well, of course, it's none of my business," the doctor admitted cheerfully. "But I still think you'd be much wiser to give them a warning this time." He turned, jumped down to the floor again and walked away.

The policeman stood thinking for a moment. He was not very old, probably not thirty yet, and he looked harrassed. He glanced at the African sergeant who had accompanied him onto the platform, but the sergeant was gazing woodenly at the crowd. "All right, sergeant," he said abruptly. "Clear all these people out of here. And make sure they don't hang around outside and try to start the meeting again."

The sergeant saluted and began to shout orders. The crowd made some attempt to resist, but the police began to pull them out of their chairs and before long they were filing out quietly. Kwotze looked across at Nkrumah and

saw the anger in his face. He was too anxious about what the policeman was going to do to feel angry himself any longer.

"Now; I'm going to let you go with a warning this time," said the policeman, turning back to them. "But if you try and hold one more meeting without a permit, the whole lot of you'll find yourselves in jail. Do you understand?"

Nkrumah glared sullenly at him without replying. "Yes, we are understanding," said Kwotze hastily. "Was mistake."

Nkrumah left without a word as soon as the policeman had dismissed them, and Kwotze walked thoughtfully back to his room in the attic of the Convention headquarters. Sheer luck, the intervention of some stupid white man, had saved him, he reflected; but at least he knew where he stood with Nkrumah now, and he would never again underestimate his cunning.

## CHAPTER 5

"Game," said Anson, grimacing as the ball hit the top of the net and glanced off into the wire at the side of the court. "And that's it for me," he added, walking across the court to the green wooden bench to pick up his towel.

"Might as well finish the set while we're about it."

"For Christ's sake," Anson grumbled, mopping his face. "I can hardly see the net. Let's go have a drink."

"Yes, you always want to pack it in when you're losing, don't you?"

"Charles, I won the first two sets, remember? Don't be so bloody aggressive. Come and have a beer, and we'll start again tomorrow where we left off—five three to you."

"No. I'm going to have a bath first. I'll see you later."

Anson wrapped the towel round his throat, put on his sweater and walked up the hill to the club. The sun slipped below the horizon and the suddenness of the equatorial dusk blotted out the little valleys below him. The headgear of the mine enjoyed its few moments of unexpected beauty, silhouetted against a crimson sky, and a parrot squawked at him from the verandah of a bungalow while a slim native girl shuffled past with a basket of cassava on her head. He had arrived back that morning from a prospecting trip up-country, and he was looking forward to his first bottle of beer for several weeks. As he crossed the billiard room he paused briefly to greet two bored players, then walked across the lounge to join George, who was sitting with the doctor and his wife.

"Ah," said George, "good to be back, eh? What'll you have—beer or whiskey?" He snapped his fingers for the steward and Anson ordered beer, looking at George curiously. He knew that the trip had been a waste of time—the samples he had sent back had assayed out to less than two pennyweights a ton—and yet George seemed almost elated about it. "See you haven't been wearing yourself out in the bush," George went on, pulling his nose complacently. "In the old days, when I had to go out on field trips, I never had much energy left for tennis when I got back."

Anson smiled perfunctorily as he crossed his legs. He was always a little afraid he was going to wince visibly when George was in one of his pukka sahib-moods. His heart sank as he saw him settle back in his chair to reminisce about the good old days.

The doctor glanced at Anson sympathetically. "Turn it up, George," he grunted. "When you were his age you were too busy romping around with lusty little mammies...." His smile faded abruptly as he caught his wife's eye. The doctor had dropped a brick. George's wife was due out next week.

In the awkward silence that followed, Anson looked around for the steward. The lounge of the recreation club was a large room, sparingly furnished with morris chairs and dull, cigarette-scarred tables. There was a small stage at one end, used at long intervals for concerts, and at the other, the bar, with its bright bottles and gleaming glasses, did something to alleviate the gloom of the surrounding walls. But it was a depressing room—a room with an unmistakable atmosphere of exile and nostalgia.

The steward padded away after distributing their drinks. A drop of sweat gathered under Anson's arm, then trickled slowly down his ribs, cool and caressing, until he shivered suddenly and sat up to conceal it. The doctor picked up his drink, saw that his wife was watching him, and swilled the ice around idly before putting it down again.

"Oh, by the way sir," said Anson suddenly, "I brought a youngster down for you. He's a Mohammedan all right, but he doesn't seem to know what tribe he belongs to—just turned up one day and asked for work."

"Well, whatever tribe he is, he's bound to be a better garden boy than these damned Fanti. All they ever want to do is to learn to read and become lawyers."

The doctor laughed. "And why the hell shouldn't they?" he demanded. "Do you really expect them to remain nice and dumb and illiterate indefinitely, just for your benefit?" He plunged enthusiastically into the familiar topic of native emancipation and Anson found it very nearly as boring as George's reminiscences. His own feelings on the subject were so ambiguous that he usually avoided thinking about them. In any case, to argue with George about it was absurd. He had clearly never suffered any doubts about his superiority as a white man, and his indulgent smile made it plain he thought the doctor was trying to pull his leg.

He really was a queer old bird, Anson reflected, leaning down to scratch a mosquito bite on his ankle. His father had been in the Indian Civil Service

before he was killed in the first World War, and his grandfather a Commissioner of Police somewhere out east--yet George had ended up as a sort of semi-qualified geologist on a seedy little mine. There must have been some slip up in his past; some juicy little scandal which had turned George into the remittance man of his family. Which was a pity, thought Anson, because when you looked at him such a clear image immediately sprang into focus--an image of a white ceremonial dress, with sword and topee, the elegant feathered plume waving gently in the breeze as he addressed some tribal Ndaba. He was a Sanders who had somehow become separated from his river.

The doctor's wife looked at herself in the mirror of her compact, then shut it with a snap as her husband paused. "Now then, Reggie," she said firmly, "time to jump down off your soapbox and go home."

"But it's my round, Mrs. Thornton, and I've already signalled to the steward to bring it." Betty Thornton, stung by George's confidence that she would defer to him, looked as though she was about to defy him instead; but in the end she sat back with a scowl of impatience. God yes, Anson chuckled to himself, what a magnificent governor he would have made. This was just how he and his kind had faced down hostile natives and kept an empire going. He had the eyes for it: clear blue eyes, crinkling at the corners in the best tradition of men who had gazed with incorruptible integrity into the dazzling sunshine of vast, esoteric territories.

Anson poured himself another glass of beer, confused by the mixture of contempt and affection he felt for George. "Mustn't let yourself go in the tropics, m'boy." George had actually said this to him shortly after Anson had arrived on the mine. It was preposterous, but the standard George set himself was so high you couldn't really laugh at him. After work every day, he would return to his bungalow for a bath. At half-past five he would be sitting on the verandah of the club, drinking four gin and tonics. At half-past seven he would go back to his bungalow, put on a tie, eat his supper, and then sit on the verandah for an hour afterwards drinking two whiskey-sodas before going to bed. On Saturday nights a girl from the compound would slip through his back garden into the bungalow. Nothing short of a catastrophe, it seemed, could upset this routine.

Then, incredibly, a week before Anson had left for his trip, George had returned from his last leave to announce that he was married. In fact, he hadn't really announced it at all. He had just set about the practical preparations for his wife's arrival and the news had leaked out from the office.

His houseboy, armed with bucket and scrubbing brush, was driven from room to room in the shabby little bungalow until his nostrils smarted with carbolic. The few sad relics of bachelorhood—the broken coffee table which had been propped up with a brick, the rusted assegais, the sagging elephant's hoof stool—had been thrown out to reappear in mud-walled compound huts, and Mohammedan traders trudged nightly to sit cross-legged and patient on the verandah with leather cushions and ivory ornaments and sad, expectant faces, while George, in a creaking cane chair, made idle bids and sipped his whiskey and soda. Anson had joined him for a nightcap the evening before he left and experienced a curious sense of fulfilment as he listened to them bargaining.

"Two shilling, you Wangara bastard, and not a penny more," George said, and the sad eyes lit up with the joy of trading. "Aeii! Two shilling? You make good joke." They chuckled; shook their heads and chuckled and rearranged their treasures. "Massa, in Kumasi they go buy for fifteen shilling. All same for fifteen shilling. You number one massa—go bring number one wife...I give you for ten shilling." And George cursed them with pleasant, familiar profanity while he looked out over their heads at the stars. "Massa," they said softly. "Massa...."

"Well," said George, breaking into Anson's thoughts, "and what did you manage to bag while you were up there?"

"Bag? Oh—nothing much," he replied, irritated with himself because he sounded so sheepish.

"Odd. The snipe should be in the dhambos by now; and anyway, there must have been some guinea fowl around?"

"One or two. But I didn't have my gun with me when I saw them."

"Mmm—pity we can't find some work for you down near the coast. I remember one trip I went on, not far from Accra...."

This time there was no stopping him. George was comfortably launched into his favourite topic; one of the few of which he ever spoke with anything approaching vivacity. He talked for nearly half an hour about difficult shots and tricky birds—but always with an unaffected modesty. Although he was a superb shot, either with a rifle or a shot-gun, George never reminded his listeners of this. He would have good luck if he brought down a distant bird, and shoot badly when he missed it. He might, indeed, have been a little more interesting if he had boasted occasionally; as it was, he remained a crashing bore.



Betty Thornton sat, the muscles of her jaws working as she strove to suppress a yawn, and her husband signalled surreptitiously for another drink. Anson felt sorry for her. At thirty-five she was still an attractive woman with a nice figure, but her face was becoming pinched with anxiety over Reggie's drinking, her skin a little leathery from too much sun. It was generally agreed that Reggie drank too much to satisfy her sexually, and an uneasy lust stirred in Anson as he recalled the night he had gone to dinner with them. The doctor had been called away to deliver a baby in the compound and Betty had seemed to change subtly before his eyes as they sat drinking brandy after the meal. The hint of shrewishness vanished and all at once she had appeared very soft and appealing. Anson wondered afterwards whether it had been his imagination. But on the whole he thought not. She had dismissed the servant, then sat beside him on the settee, touching him frequently on the hand and arm while she spoke. And when she leaned forward to pick up her drink from the low coffee table, her breast had rested gently against his shoulder. For a little while Anson was convinced that if he put his arm around her she would have kissed him. But there was no way of being sure, and if he had been wrong the embarrassment would have been a lasting one. The moment had passed and they had become awkward with each other, until finally Anson had excused himself and walked back to his bungalow, wondering if he had been a silly little prig not to have made some exploratory gesture.

"Well," said George at last, "time for chop. If you will excuse me, Mrs. Thornton...?"

Anson nearly burst out laughing. It was so typical of George to insist that they remain, and then leave as soon as he was ready to. He glanced at his watch as George walked away from their table. It was twenty-five past seven.

"God almighty," the doctor sighed. "He's the living prototype of Sitwell's bluff old colonel...the one who couldn't understand how Jesus Christ came to spend forty days and forty nights in the wilderness without shooting anything."

"Don't be so beastly literary," Anson complained.

"It's true though--he is."

"I know, and it makes you wonder what on earth his wife's going to be like."

"His wife," the doctor replied, "will be an ageing spinster who has leapt into George's unsophisticated arms with grateful agility. She will be

the daughter of a retired Indian Army Colonel, rather horsey and wearing tweed skirts and flat, sensible shoes—a potential memsahib, in fact. And she'll probably be a crack shot herself."

Betty giggled suddenly. "Somehow it's awfully difficult to picture him...."

"Picture him what?" the doctor asked, and Anson began to laugh. At one time or another nearly everyone on the mine had tried to visualize George in bed with his mammy on Saturday nights. It was an impossible image.

"Oh, that," the doctor grunted. "I expect he does it by numbers. Of course, we may all be fooling ourselves. He may be a damn good screw."

"Must you be so coarse," his wife said irritably.

"I like that. You brought the subject up."

But Betty was not listening. In common with all the wives on the mine, she was anxious about the future. George's wife would have precedence over everyone but the general manager's wife, and there was always the frightful possibility she might turn out to be an attractive young thing, come to lord it over them. The thought was almost too awful to contemplate, but if you regarded George as a husband rather than a lover, it was not impossible. He was, after all, handsome and in many ways distinguished. He drew a large salary, from which he must by now have put away a comfortable sum. He was sober and industrious and gallant in his own archaic fashion—all of which could easily turn the head of some silly young girl who was afraid of being left on the shelf.

"In any case," said Reggie, "we shouldn't be laughing at him. We're going to need our Georges in the near future."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I was down in Accra for a few days while you were away—had to go to one of these medical health conferences. It's pretty obvious down there that we're going to have trouble with the Africans before long."

Anson looked sceptical. "The independence jag, you mean?"

"Yes. I went to a nationalist meeting. Quite a show. The odious Nkrumah was speaking, and whatever it is, he's got it. He whipped up the crowd so quickly they were ready to go out and storm the legislature right then and there."

"What are they hoping to do with their independence if they get it? They can't run the country—they couldn't even run this mine on their own."

"That's debatable, of course; and in any case, it's hardly the point."

If we really believe in our own cant about democracy, they've got every right to go to hell in their own way if they want to."

"They will, too. They'll go right back to tribal warfare. And then the Russians will probably step in and take over."

"Very likely. But that doesn't alter the fact that we're going to get flung out before long. We've got a labour government now...."

"Oh God," Betty sighed. "Can't we ever talk about anything but coons?"

"That, my pet," said the doctor firmly, "is one word you're going to have to banish from your vocabulary very soon. And we're going to be talking about them a great deal in the near future—as well as about George, who's about to come into his own. He'll be going out like Cornwallis on the steps of the consulate, while the rest of us hide under our beds."

"You're really on their side, aren't you?" said Anson, looking at the doctor curiously.

Reggie Thornton grimaced. "I'm not on anybody's side," he replied irritably. "I just don't see why they shouldn't be allowed to have a go on their own—but you obviously disagree, eh?"

"Me? I'm not really sure what I think. Sometimes I feel sorry for them. But they just haven't got what it takes. And it seems so unfair, somehow. Before we came along they did nothing but attack each other and sell each other as slaves. We stopped them slaughtering each other, stopped them from dying of every disease under the sun, gave them stability, taught 'em how to read and write—and now they want to turn round and fling us out so they can go pretty well right back to where they were...."

"This is the sort of thing tyrants and dictators have been spouting since the flood—'we're doing it for their own good!' It's what you say to children. But these aren't children, they're...."

"Well, what the hell are we supposed to do, then? Just bale out and leave them to drift back into chaos?"

"That's the intriguing part of it—there's nothing we can do. History boils down to nothing more than an endless series of rebellions and revolutions, none of which make any real difference in the long run because of a basic and unchangeable paradox: the incompatibility of individual freedom and social necessity."

"Why? They can easily be—be reconciled with a little commonsense."

"Yes, that's what the person who's on top always says...not the under-dog. You wouldn't say it if you were an African."

"Of course not. Which only proves that Africans don't have much common sense."

"Common sense my arse! As a white man you're enjoying privileges which have nothing to do with common sense. And you know it. So does your friend Kwame Nkrumah—and he's out to do something about it."

"But surely they'll have to be educated first, so they are capable of governing themselves intelligently. It may take ten or...."

"Come off it. Nobody ever educates people so that they can relinquish their own power to them. They have to be forced to give it up by some individual like Nkrumah, who's got enough whatever it is to organize the underdogs."

"Some grubby little agitator, who's just looking after Number One?"

"Yeah, that's just what everyone called John Wilkes, or Tom Paine, or—or Kier Hardie. Yet now their names are in anthologies about Heroes in the Fight for Freedom. I was reading Hulme the other day...."

Anson laughed. "You and your bloody literature. How come you didn't turn into a novelist, or a critic?"

"There was a time when I fancied myself as an A.J. Cronin or a Somerset Maugham—but writing's such damned hard work. Should have been a don, really; dons can't afford to drink. Anyway, this Hulme bloke says we're all trapped by a dichotomy—the conflict between romanticism and classicism. He says romantics believe the individual is perfectible, but only if he can chuck aside the restrictions of social order. Whereas classicists believe that human nature has never changed and never will change: it's greedy and self-interested, so the individual must be forced to subordinate himself to some sort of mutual restraint—in other words, government—if we're going to survive."

"What's the solution then, since you've got it all off so pat?"

The doctor took a long swig of whiskey. "There isn't one," he replied cheerfully. "Have another drink. Be like Frederick Henry and contract a separate peace. Read the myth of Sisyphus. And have another drink."

"Well, I know who Frederick Henry was—that's Hemingway. What's the myth of Sisyphus?"

"Sisyphus was condemned to push a rock up to the top of a mountain for the rest of his life—or it may have been eternity, I forget which. In any case, when he got it to the top the rock always rolled down the other side and he had to begin again. And that's what's happening now, of course. The dear old empire builders have been pushing their rock up the hill. Now it's about to roll down the other side again."

Anson tilted his glass and swilled the beer around in the bottom of it. The argument didn't seem quite relevant, somehow. "So what it all boils down to," he said, a little irritably, "is that we're all just helpless creatures of destiny?"

"No, not destiny—paradox, which is much more frightening. The fact is that revolutions almost never produce the results people hope for. They find that they've merely exchanged one set of dissatisfactions for another. Remember Chesterton's crack about the suffragettes? 'A million women screamed that they would no longer be dictated to—and promptly became shorthand-typists.' It'll be the same with the Africans. They think they're all going to jump straight into our shoes: own cars, have servants, drink liqueurs after dinner. But they won't—or at least very few of them will. Crooked entrepreneurs from from all over the world will descend on them in a cloud to cheat them of what they like to think of as their inheritance."

Anson finished his beer and sat up. "Well, I suppose we'll find out soon enough," he said. "In the meantime, I'm hungry. I'm going to eat."

"As a matter of fact, you're going to start finding out tomorrow."

Anson paused, his hands resting on the arms of his chair. "How come?"

"You'll see," the doctor replied, snapping his fingers for the steward.

"You are a rotten bastard," Anson complained. "You love to arouse people's curiosity, and then leave them to stew about it."

"No, I'm not a bastard at all. I'm a very charitable man. I leave you with something to interest you so that you won't fall into an existential despair."

"Oh balls! Hell, I'm sorry, Betty...."

"Don't apologise. He's always talking balls. I've had to listen to him doing it for the last twelve years."

Anson walked back to his bungalow trying to decide whether he felt anxious or exhilarated at the prospect of trouble. He no longer had any real doubt that trouble was coming. Almost overnight the Africans had become much harder to handle. Only a day or two before leaving on his trip he had been faced with a situation which would have been unheard of when he arrived on the mine, less than six months ago. Anson wanted to measure the exposure of reef at the top of a new development raise. He stood at the bottom and waved his lamp, but the drill didn't stop. He knew the crew had seen him—the lights on their hats swung down on him when he waved—but the drilling continued. Angrily he climbed up the raise to the drilling platform and made the familiar sign to

stop—a finger drawn across his throat. The miner, a big Northern-Territories boy, finally shut the drill off and turned to harangue Anson in his own tongue. Then, just as Anson was about to climb up onto the platform, he started to drill again.

For a moment Anson was tempted to try and elbow him out of the way and shut down the jackhammer himself. But it would be dangerous; one of them might easily slip and fall down the sixty-foot raise. Instead, he climbed back down and shut off the valve on the four-inch main compressed air pipe in the drive below. The driller came scrambling after him, shouting at the top of his voice, and he actually lunged at Anson as he stood with his back to the valve. For what seemed a very long time to Anson, they stood facing each other. Then finally the driller backed off and went to sit sullenly on the wooden toolbox beside the entrance to the raise.

Anson turned to his chop boy. "Give me a drink. And ask him what all the bloody palaver's about."

"Massa, he say you go humbug him. He no catch bonus when you go stop drill all time."

"How many times I go stop his drill?"

"No be plenty massa. Be small-small," Tosa replied.

"About once a week, in fact. And I don't do it for my own flaming pleasure. I do it because there's no point in drilling if we don't know what we're drilling into. Now look, make you go tell that insolent bastard if he no go stoppum next time, I go for shaft and shut off air. Then nobody in this whole bloody section'll get any bonus. You savvy?"

When he finished in the raise, Anson turned on the air valve and walked away without saying any more to the driller. Just as he was about to round a corner in the driveway, the boy started to hurl abuse at his back. Anson resisted the temptation to ask Tosa what he was saying.

Sitting down to his supper twenty minutes later, Anson found himself studying Amadou and Kwela, Henry Fuller's boy, with a new curiosity. He wondered whether they really were filled with visions of freedom and sudden affluence. He was tempted to ask them, but decided not to while Charles was around.

## CHAPTER 6

As they pulled up in the dusty parking lot behind their office the following morning, George turned to Anson and told him the general manager wanted to see him before he went underground.

"Why, what've I done?" he inquired.

"Nothing, as far as I know," George replied, switching off the ignition. "It's about the Ex-Servicemen's Association."

"Hell, they're only about six of us on the mine, aren't there?"

"He means the black ones."

Anson walked across to the general manager's office with vague ideas of military preparations for an insurrection running through his mind. Arthur Hutchinson was a small, wiry man, very bald and a little deaf from years of exposure to the roar of jackhammers and ventilation fans trapped in the workings of a mine. Anson had seen very little of him. He was due for retirement soon, and for the past two or three years he had been saving vigorously, so that he seldom attended any social functions. He was regarded as a nice enough old man, but an evasive one without any real authority. He invariably delegated any unpleasant tasks and kept himself so isolated that there was a touch of the eccentric ship's captain about him. Anson looked at him curiously as he walked into his office.

"Ah, there you are Payne. Have a chair, will you?" He smiled briefly at Anson, but there was something almost furtive about his attitude and Anson wondered if he was in trouble after all. "You know that Seagar is going on leave tomorrow?" he went on, looking up suddenly.

"Yes, sir..." Anson replied uncertainly.

"No need to look so apprehensive," said the general manager, lighting a cigarette and looking surprisingly unfurtive all at once. "I'm merely going to ask you to do me a small favour."

Anson looked out of the window, feeling foolish. The old man was a very normal person--a shy man who had been slandered by the envious and turned into something halfway between a clown and an ogre. He had, when you looked

at him more closely, an intelligent face and a very pleasant smile.

"It's a little difficult to get over the feeling that you're up in front of the headmaster, or the C.O."

Hutchinson turned his head sideways. "I'm sorry...?"

"I said it's difficult to get over the feeling that you're being called up in front of the C.O."

"Yes, I know. But you needn't worry--nobody's got any complaints about you at the moment. How are you liking it out here?"

"I'm not sure yet," Anson replied. "Everything seems temporary, somehow. I suppose that's how we felt all through the war, and I haven't got over it yet."

"Oh, I don't think so. I've been here for nearly thirty years, and I still feel the same way. Perhaps it's because we don't really belong here."

Anson looked at him in surprise. "Don't you think we do, sir?"

"I often wonder. But of course, I'm not supposed to let anyone know that. Er--what I want you to do is to take over from Seagar as chairman of the Ex-Serviceman's Association."

"Me? But I don't know the first thing about it," Anson protested.

"Take the day off and get Seagar to brief you. He's not going until tomorrow."

"I'd much rather not, sir. I'm just not a...."

"I daresay. But I'm asking you to."

Anson paused. "In other words, it's an order?"

"No. A request. I can't order you to do something that's obviously not connected with your work. But as you must be aware, we're going to have trouble with the Africans soon...and we're all going to be involved. The members of this committee you'll be chairing are politicians. They're all potential troublemakers, and I want somebody like you who's capable of keeping them in their place...and of giving me an idea of how militant they actually are."

Anson wondered why he had refused so promptly. It had been a sort of reflex, because in fact he was enjoying a glow of satisfaction. He was being invited into the establishment; singled out as a man of authority. "Don't they want an African as chairman?" he asked, to give himself time to think.

"Yes, of course they do. And that's just what we want to prevent."

"Oh, well, I'll give it a try, then...."



"Good. Shouldn't be too sticky. They'll be bickering about money most of the time. Dues are collected by payroll deduction, so there's a pretty healthy kitty to be given out to ex-servicemen who want to start up a business of their own. I'll be very surprised if everyone on the committee isn't trying to swipe the funds for himself."

"I'll hunt up Seagar and see what the score is."

"Thank you. And I'd be grateful if you'd drop in to see me after you've held your first meeting and let me know how it's going."

Anson found Seagar in his bungalow. Although it was only eight o'clock in the morning, he was sitting on his verandah drinking beer. He looked at Anson sharply when he announced the purpose of his visit, and shrugged.

"Lotta bullshit," he said indifferently.

"So I hear. How often do you meet--and when do you have general meetings?"

"We only had two meetings in the last six months. And Christ knows when the last general meeting was. You want a beer?"

"No thanks. What about the books? Who looks after them?"

"The Secretary-Treasurer. They're supposed to be audited once a year by the accounts department. Dunno when they were done last."

Seagar shouted to his boy for another beer and Anson had a fleeting impression that he was nervous. Seagar was a shift-boss in the mill, a small, sharp-faced man who was inclined to turn nasty when he had been drinking. He had been a corporal in the 8th Army, and boasted a good deal about his exploits in the desert. Anson had had very little to do with him, but he recalled the flurry of gossip a month or two ago when Seagar had been charged with assaulting a mammy in his bungalow.

"Could we have a look at the books, then--whatever paperwork you've got?" he asked.

"Dunkwah's got 'em all."

"Who's he?"

"The secretary. One of Henry's clerks."

"Well, perhaps we could stroll up and go through them together?"

"Nah. He's on leave. Went up to Kumasi to see his cronies, and he won't be back till tonight."

"Hell, surely we can find out where he keeps the stuff, can't we?"

"'Fraid not. Any case, I got a lot to do today."

Anson glanced at his bottle of beer and thanked him a little sarcastically, then went back to his office to work on the sample report for the end of the month. He discovered from his own clerk that Dunkwah was also secretary of the newly formed carpenter's union and was held in some awe because of his organizational skills. Anson toyed with the idea of talking to Henry Fuller about him, but decided it would be a waste of time. Dunkwah would be back at work the next day, and he would find out more about him in five minutes than Henry would have discovered in a year.

But Dunkwah, Anson learned the following morning, was an even more aggressive character than he had anticipated. And since the news leaked out that Anson was to be the new chairman, Anson had already been visited by two members of the association before he saw him. With Henry's permission, he had sent for Dunkwah to bring the books to his office. His dress was more elaborate than the normal uniform of the white collar worker--he wore long trousers, a collar and tie, and a sports jacket at once too loud and much too heavy. Sweat glistened on his broad face. He walked in without knocking and immediately sat down.

Anson looked at him without speaking.

"You want for see me, sah?"

"You're Dunkwah, I take it?"

"Yes sah."

"Mm, I must be getting deaf...I didn't hear you knock. And I can't for the life of me recall asking you to sit down."

Dunkwah tried to face him down, flat nostrils flaring arrogantly. But in the end he looked away. "Mistah Payne, you think all Africans come servants..." he began uncertainly.

"Stand up!" Anson snapped.

Dunkwah stood up sullenly. "Now give me those books and get out of here until I send for you," Anson said. "And you'd better make damn sure you knock before you come in next time."

After he had left, Anson sat looking out of the window for a little while, wondering whether he wouldn't have been wiser to have ignored Dunkwah's insolence. He shrugged and turned to the books. They consisted almost entirely of applications for loans, none of which had been processed, and some of which dated back for more than a year. The accounts were chaotic, but as far as Anson could determine, the association had a credit balance of some fourteen hundred pounds. He confirmed this by telephone with the bank

manager, then went to see Crosby, the mine accountant. Crosby pulled a face. "Yes, I've had this on my conscience for some time. I've got to do an audit." He studied the books for a few minutes and, to Anson's surprise, only about twenty or thirty pounds appeared to be missing. Crosby promised to put the books in order over the weekend, and Anson returned to his office and sent for Dunkwah again. He stood in front of Anson's desk with an expression of contemptuous resignation on his face.

"So far as I can make out, the whole thing's one horrible bloody mess," said Anson. "And we're going to start cleaning it up on Monday evening. From now on we'll hold a committee meeting every second Monday....".

"No good. Not...I have businesses of national importance."

"In that case, since you can't spare the time to attend meetings, I suggest you resign at once."

Dunkwah stood for a long time without replying. A trickle of sweat rolled down the side of his face and he shifted awkwardly from one leg to the other. "No be good," he said eventually, relapsing into pigeon. "You go make plenty humbug...."

"Do you know what a constitution is?"

"Yes sah."

"And what does the constitution of this association say about committee meetings?"

Dunkwah licked his lips and remained silent.

"Yes, you do know, of course, but you've been ignoring it--just running things to suit yourself. Well, things are going to be different from now on. The constitution calls for two committee meetings a month... and that's what we're going to have in future. If you don't like it you can get out."

"Yes sah."

"Now, from your so-called minutes, I see you've held three meetings in the past year, and nothing at all came out of any of them. Why haven't all these applications for loans been dealt with? There's one here from one of Mr. Gilby's boss-boys which is more than a year old."

"That boy doesn't want moneys now."

"Oh, that's odd! He came to see me this morning before he went underground and asked me why his loan had been refused."

Anson sat looking at him expectantly, but Dunkwah had no answer. He stood like a sulky schoolboy, looking down at the floor in front of him.

"All right," said Anson, "we'll go into this at the meeting. I want you to see the other three committee members personally and tell them to be here in my office at six o'clock on Monday evening. And you can also tell them that if they're not here, I shall regard their absence as a resignation. Do you understand me?"

Anson sat looking at the door for a few minutes after Dunkwah left. He had humbled him, trampled on him in fact, and he was uncomfortably aware of how much he had enjoyed doing so. He would have to tone things down a bit at the meeting. Nevertheless, it was reassuring to feel such a clear cut sense of superiority. He locked the association's books in his desk drawer and quickly forgot all about them because it was a Saturday morning. He was going up to Obuassi for a weekend cricket match. Staying overnight at another mine made a pleasant break and he was particularly looking forward to visiting Obuassi. It was by far the most prosperous mine on the Coast--Anson had seen a number of samples from there in which the gold was plainly visible to the naked eye--and there were rumours of stopes so rich they had been sealed off and left as a reserve to be used when the orebody began to dwindle. There was a hint of the romantic about such affluence.

He went back to his bungalow, packed a bag and climbed onto the bus in high spirits. Although he was a very average cricketer at home, in this restricted community he had become something of a star. Anson found it gratifying to be a large frog, even if the pond was a very small one. And since there was much talk on the bus of the underground manager's two attractive and unmarried daughters, he recaptured some of the excitement of an away match at school--an away match in which he had known that sisters and girl friends of the team would be watching.

When they arrived, however, red with laterite dust and sore from leaning against the turns on the winding road, Anson suffered a mild disappointment. The captain of the opposing team, who was supervisor of the power plant, had been unable to meet them--a temporary overload had thrown out the breakers in the plant--consequently there was something of a hiatus in the arrangements. Nobody knew who was supposed to be putting up with whom, and Anson found himself in the company of a burly, rather uncouth Cornishman called White. In the last away match at Bibiani he had stayed with the Assistant District Officer. A little dismayed by his snobbishness, Anson made a determined effort to be congenial.

Obuassi won the toss and elected to bat first. While the opening

batsmen were padding up, the captain took Anson aside and apologised.

"I say, old man, frightfully sorry about this--we've had a bit of a balls up. You were supposed to be staying with the U.A.C. lads. There's not much we can do about it now without offending...."

"Oh, that's all right. It'll do me good to see how the other half lives."

"That's the stuff. Chalkey's a bit of a rough diamond. He never played cricket before he came out here, but he's got a splendid eye and he's usually good for twenty or thirty very quick runs. Strictly crossed bat fudging, but it works in this class of cricket."

"Hmm...have to see if I can't do something about that."

"The thing is...well, I don't want to sound like a bloody Dutch uncle, but they drink pretty heavily on Chalkey's mess. And of course, they fraternize. So don't let them get you drunk and do something you'll regret afterwards."

Anson laughed. "Don't worry. I haven't been out here long enough yet. They still look very black and thick-lipped and unappetizing to me." He walked onto the field secure in his immunity to the sort of temptation the opposing captain had suggested. Yet the conversation had stimulated him with faint visions of licentiousness, and since he was also stimulated by the knowledge that the two eligible daughters were watching, he bowled a good deal more effectively than he had ever done before.

In fact, he succeeded in taking his host's wicket for only four of the twenty or thirty runs the captain had forecast. Chalkey White had run down the pitch to his first ball and hooked it for a boundary. Anson had bounced the next one short and the wicket-keeper had very nearly thrown Chalkey out. Three balls later, another ferocious hook had snicked the ball neatly into the leg trap Anson set for his outswinger. In all, Anson took five wickets and two good catches at first slip. The last wicket fell just as the light was fading and with only sixty runs on the board. He left the field feeling thoroughly elated and sat on the verandah of the club swilling down pints of shandy and exchanging insults with Chalkey, who threatened extravagant retribution on the following day.

A number of tables had been pushed together to form one long one and the whole team sat around it. There were some wives at the top end, but Anson found himself very much in the bachelor element at the bottom. He felt a little out of things, irritated by the fact that Charles Liddell had been

billeted with one of the government officials. Charles sat near the top of the table, casting patronizing glances at Anson from time to time. But Chalkey and John Sims, the miner with whom he shared his mess, were in such good humour that Anson soon settled down to enjoy the evening. An hour or so later they left the club reluctantly in an old army surplus fifteen hundred-weight lorry, which ground its way slowly up the long hill to Chalkey's bungalow. His two hosts immediately began to drink whiskey while Anson had his bath. It was nearly nine o'clock before they sat down to dinner. Chalkey and John took little interest in the food. The whiskey continued to flow and they gossiped of people Anson did not know and laughed immoderately at jokes which had no point for him. At half-past ten the lorry returned to take them back to the club for the Saturday night dance. Anson felt drowsy; he would have much preferred to go to bed.

But when he got to the dance he enjoyed himself. The recreation club was very similar to their own, except that it was on a much larger scale. There were more than twenty wives and it seemed odd to see so many couples dancing. Anson knew his protocol by now and he went about his duty dances. First the GM's wife, then the underground manager's--on down until he had danced with all three of the mine captain's wives. Each time he returned to his table he was greeted by a chorus of ironic and ribald remarks which grew noisier as the evening wore on. Two other shift-bosses had joined his hosts, together with the foreman of the machine shop, a big, ginger-haired Yorkshireman called Stan, whose whole body shook when he laughed. They were all more or less drunk by now and a little Welshman from the next table, his face pocked with the black scars of a coalminer, kept stumbling across and insisting on shaking hands with everyone.

"See the one sitting by 'erself?" John Sims leaned against Anson confidentially and pointed to a woman of about thirty who had been left on her own for some time. She was the most attractive woman in the room and Anson had been looking at her a good deal. "She's the one you should be dancing with, instead of them old cows. Her 'usband's always playing cards in the back, an' she looking for it from someone."

"Oh, why don't you oblige her then?"

Sims laughed. "Nah, she's too toffee nosed for me. But you oughta give 'er a whirl. She'd go for your la-di-da accent."

"How big's her husband?"

"Ah shit, he's a little runt--clerk in the Secretariat."

Anson's attention was distracted by the steward, who leaned down to talk to Chalkey. He heard the name Kosa, and a moment or two later Chalkey's houseboy came to their table.

"Sarah no come, massa," he said, his attitude a curious mixture of familiarity and apprehension.

"You no talk proper," said Chalkey threateningly.

"She go want money plenty too much. Thirty shilling. Too many massa tonight."

Chalkey prodded the boy in the chest with his finger. "You go fetchum," he said quietly. "We talk money tomorrow."

"Massa, plenty palaver...."

Chalkey began to rise from his chair and the boy shuffled away hastily, shaking his head. Anson smiled to himself and went to dance with one of the underground manager's daughters. On closer inspection he found them rather disappointing. They were pretty in a sort of shop-girlish way and attractive only because they were single. They had danced continuously the whole evening without ever seeming to take any interest in their partners. All the time they were looking round to assure themselves that they were being watched and admired. A couple of spoilt little bitches, thought Anson; but not through any fault of their own, really.

The eldest one, Mary Carpenter, looked up at him eagerly. "Oo, I was hoping you'd ask. You're a smashing bowler, aren't you? But I'm afraid Roger's got this dance. P'raps the next one?"

Anson thanked her without committing himself and began to walk back to his table. On a sudden impulse he turned aside and asked the woman who had been sitting for so long by herself to dance. She looked startled for a moment, but stood up readily enough. "I'd love to," she agreed.

She danced beautifully, and Anson tried to forget that there was obviously some very good reason why nobody was dancing with her. Half way round the floor she squeezed him gently. "Mmm, nice," she murmured, leaning back to look up at him. "Where did you spring from?"

"Kuwassii. We're up for cricket this weekend."

"And so, of course, you don't know that my husband always makes a scene if I dance with anyone?"

"How can he, if he's not here?"

"Oh, he's not far away. He's playing bridge in the card room. And somebody always finds it necessary to tell him when I'm dancing. That's why

no one dances with me any more. I shouldn't come, really, but that bungalow...." She broke off and looked up at him again. "I'm sorry. I'm whining, aren't I?"

Anson suddenly realized that she was not quite sober. He felt embarrassed, a little scared. But he too had drunk a good deal, and she was very attractive. "Let's just enjoy the dance," he said.

With a smile that was almost a sigh, she pressed herself against him so willingly that Anson quickly found himself embarrassed in a more obvious way. He could feel her entire body through the thin cotton dress she was wearing. He tried to move away, but she pulled him back. "No, don't," she said. "It's so reassuring to know that it can still happen. Do you know what this reminds me of?"

"Well...."

"It reminds me of the first time I did this to a boy at a tea dance. Oh God," she went on abruptly, "if there were only somewhere we could go. But in this God-forsaken hole you're never alone. If it isn't the Europeans, the servants are always spying on you."

They danced for several minutes more, and Anson found it hard to let her go when the record ended. "I told you we're being watched," she said gently, disengaging herself. As he followed her back to her table, Anson glanced down and was relieved to find that nothing showed. She sat down when they reached it and immediately lit a cigarette.

"Can I join you for a drink?" he asked.

She blew out the match and shook her head. "Better not. What's your name?"

Anson told her and she smiled at him wistfully. "Well, Anson Payne, you go on back to your Chalkey. He'll have a nice little mammy waiting for you back at the bungalow and you'll feel wonderful in the morning. It's so easy for you men."

"I don't do that sort of thing," he protested angrily, but she merely smiled and made a little kissing motion with her mouth. "Go on, off you go," she said, picking up her drink. "You'll only find yourself involved in a nasty little squabble if you hang around me."

A barrage of suggestive remarks greeted him when he returned to his table. "She goin' to fix you up?" Sims asked. "Where are you going to do it," said Chalkey, "in the back of the lorry? You can bring her back to our place if you like, an' we'll all watch."

Anson forced himself to laugh. "No, we're going to run away to Accra



and do it proper." he replied, pouring himself another glass of beer. Just then the big Yorkshireman's arm collided with Chalkey's elbow, spilling a full glass of whiskey down his chest. A roar of delight went up and everyone turned away from Anson, who sat watching the lone figure and realizing suddenly that he didn't even know her name. She was the sort of woman who had always attracted Anson; so cool and chaste that it was almost impossible to visualize her making love. Yet clearly she would, given the opportunity. Remembering the feel of her body, Anson felt a sudden urge to do something violent. Her eyes met his for a moment, then looked away as a man came up behind her. He was small and dapper, at least ten years older than her, and wearing glasses so thick they made him look faintly ridiculous. Both their faces grew tight as they spoke to each other. The woman finished her drink, picked up her handbag and they walked across the room and disappeared round the corner onto the verandah.

"Come on," said Chalkey, mopping himself with a tea cloth the steward had given him, "let's blow. My mammy's been waiting so long she's probably fingered herself off by now."

"She will if she's got any sense," said Jack Carter, one of the shift-bosses. "You're so pissed you couldn't raise a stand if Rita Hayworth kissed it for you."

"What'd you say?" Chalkey stood up and Anson was surprised to see how steady he was on his feet. "Want to bet on that?"

"Bloody right. A case of beer and my whiskey ration for the month."

"You sawn off little.... You're on. Come on. Come on back to the bungalow an' I'll show you what a Cousin Jack can do."

"Exibish!" shouted Sims excitedly. "Come on boys, let's go back and see if Chalkey can get a hard on."

They left the club in an uproar of shouts and boasts of sexual prowess. Anson was conscious of the disapproving stares of the wives and the anxious, rather apologetic gaze of John Middleton, the opposing captain. But he was indifferent to both. He had heard innumerable stories of mammy parties and he had often wished he could attend one without somehow lowering himself to the status of a voyeur. Now he could do so with a clear conscience. It was no fault of his that he had been billeted with a bunch of licentious miners. He was in the enviable position of doing what he very much wanted to do, and of being pious about it afterwards. Beside which, his encounter on the dance floor, coupled with the fact that he had drunk much more than he was accustomed

to, had brought on a hard, sexual excitement such as he had never experienced before. He had reached the stage, or rather the illusion, of great clarity, of beautifully heightened perception, and he felt capable of any iniquity. A faint whisper in the back of his mind tried to warn him that this clarity was the prelude to a spinning nausea, but it was too late. He could hardly sit still in the lorry while the sleepy driver ground his way up to the bungalow again.

When they arrived, Chalkey went to his room, threw off his wet clothes and came back with a towel wrapped around his waist. Only two of the crowd at their table had come eventually—Jack Carter, the shift-boss who had made the bet, and Stan, the big Yorkshireman. John Sims immediately poured huge shots of whiskey for them all. Anson refused, but finally accepted the glass when everyone began to shout at him. Chalkey bellowed for Kosa and the houseboy came in, sleepy-eyed but with a smile of amused resignation at their drunkenness.

"Where's Sarah?" demanded Chalkey.

"She go come, massa."

Chalkey belched complacently. "Fetchum," he said, gesturing to Anson. "New massa go jig-jig strong, all same simba."

"Not me," Anson laughed. "That's for you virile types."

Another chorus of jeers was hurled at Anson and he smiled uncomfortably.

"Was' matter, lad, you got a dose?" the Yorkshireman asked sympathetically.

"No, of course I...."

"Well, why don't shu want to, then?" Chalkey asked. He sat down heavily in a chair, thick and muscular and genuinely anxious: a host who was afraid of neglecting his obligations.

"I don't know. I haven't been out here long enough. They still look...."

"Jus' wait to see this one. Got her speshly for you. She's the... she's got the cleanest little snatch in the Northern Territories. You c'n drink a cup of tea out of it."

Anson looked up and saw that the girl had come into the room. She stood just inside the door, her expression curiously tranquil and secure. He gazed at her in surprise because she was so much more appealing than he had expected. There was white blood in her, he thought. Her hair was hardly frizzy at all, and her features almost caucasian—no thick lips, no flat nose. She was dressed in a white mother hubbard and a blue mammy-cloth, splashed with

bright orange sunflowers. At the most she couldn't have been more than sixteen years old.

"Jesus Christ!" he exclaimed. "She hardly looks like a coon at all."

"Ayraab," said Chalkey. "Lot of 'em come 'cross desert with traders. Still not int'ested?"

"No. But I can see what you mean."

"Not yet, you can't." The girl had been standing just inside the door, watching them cautiously while they discussed her. Now she moved forward further into the room as Chalkey beckoned to her. "Come on, ducks, take it off an' le's have a look," he said, motioning to her clothes. She lifted her mother hubbard over her head and her small, perfectly formed breasts rose with her arms. Anson's mouth went dry. He took a gulp of his neat whiskey, swallowing it as if it was beer. "And the rest," said Chalkey, pointing to her mammy-cloth. The girl smiled shyly as she unwound it and dropped it to the floor.

Anson took another gulp of his whiskey. A sense of fantasy overcame him. He couldn't quite bring himself to accept the fact that this girl was really standing naked in front of them all, docilely offering her body. Chalkey looked at him and burst out laughing. "Bit of all right, eh? Be good palaver, Sarah," he went on, turning to her. "You go jig-a-jig with this massa?"

She giggled. "Yo massa. Be good palaver."

Even now, however, some stubborn core of propriety made Anson reject the opportunity. Perhaps it was an ingrained puritanism, or perhaps merely cowardice: but in any case, if he was going to sleep with a black girl it would be in his own bungalow; not in this strange one, surrounded by strangers. He shook his head again, and the girl looked at him in surprise.

"Him no want?"

"Him no fit," said Chalkey. He held up his glass. "He go drink too much."

"Ah, no be so." The girl looked at Anson curiously. He was obviously the least drunk of the five of them.

"Be so," said Chalkey. "You go makum fit. Lie down and le's have a look at you proper." She hesitated for a moment, then lay down on the carpet in front of them. "Go on, open 'em up," said Chalkey, demonstrating with his own legs.

"Aiee, Massa!" she protested. But after a moment or two she did as

she was told: she drew up her knees slowly, then let them fall apart. Anson sat gazing at her with what he knew was an ugly concentration; but he had never before actually seen a woman's sexual organs. The closest he had come to it was as a child, when he had played doctors and prodded with a straw at the tight folds between some long forgotten little girl's legs. His only adult experiences had been in the dark; in the back of a car or in a darkened bedroom. Of course, he had seen some photographs, shadowy and indistinct, and looked at illustrations in medical books; but nothing had prepared him for the vivid surge of excitement which seized him now. The surprisingly small hole--not really a hole at all--it was a small nest of bright pink flesh, glistening softly in the bare white light. He lost all consciousness of company, felt no emotion; merely an overwhelming impulse to move onto the girl, to cover her and thrust himself into her. He often wondered afterwards if he might not actually have done so if the Yorkshireman hadn't started to laugh. His fat chuckle finally broke the spell and Anson turned to look at him resentfully.

"Ah reckon you've lost your bet, Jack," he rumbled, pointing at Chalkey's towel.

"Wait up, wait up," said Jack Carter, focussing with some difficulty on Chalkey. "Le's uv a look at it. E's pushed something under the towel."

Without realizing it, Anson had drunk the whiskey John Sims had given him--practically a full tumbler of neat whiskey in less than five minutes. He had only been drunk three or four times in his life, but he recognised the symptoms now. The room began to revolve very slowly. He saw Chalkey start to remove the towel, then he shut his eyes and made a huge effort to steady himself. When he opened his eyes he could see again, but the sense of unreality had grown much stronger. Chalkey's tool looked impossibly large. Rearing from his dense belly hairs, it seemed to reach almost to his chest. He turned to the girl and saw that she too was watching it, her eyes wide, not with apprehension, but with an obvious excitement. She had her tongue between her teeth and she was gazing at Chalkey with the same intentness as Anson had looked at her a few seconds previously.

"Come on, Chalkey," said Sims thickly, "le's see what y'can do with it. Le's see you screw 'er."

A senseless anger gripped Anson. Dirty little peeping-tom, he thought. But his anger was really directed at Chalkey: at the huge superiority of his genitals; at the dumb, animal virility which had so clearly excited the girl.

And yet he could still have her, thought Anson. She had been brought here for him. He shut his eyes again to gain control of himself, then opened them, determined to intervene. But he was too late. Chalkey was down on his knees between the girl's legs. Guiding himself with one hand, he lowered himself onto her, and when he found her he thrust forward, his big buttocks contracting brutally. The girl's body jerked and she sucked in her breath with a sharp hiss; but almost at once she began to move under him, her hands digging into his back, her lips drawn back from her clenched teeth in a small grimace of pleasure so intense it was almost indistinguishable from pain.

Anson forced himself to his feet, lurching dangerously as he walked towards the room he had been given. For a moment he was afraid he was going to fall and he clung grimly to the doorpost. His vision gradually cleared. He turned back to the room to watch the girl. Her body was moving more rapidly now, and making little slapping noises as it met Chalkey's. He felt a curious mixture of sadness and intolerable rage. Then abruptly she uttered a piercing scream, arching her back like a gleaming trout and lifting Chalkey's thick body well off the floor before she collapsed. Chalkey lost her for a moment, then found her again and began to lunge with a steady, elemental strength. The girl lay with her face turned toward Anson, her cheek sliding backwards and forwards on the carpet. She wore an expression of such utter peace and contentment that Anson felt the tears come to his eyes. He was horribly drunk and crying and watching something that should never be watched, he thought despairingly. With an effort, he swung his head away, lurched forward into his room and stumbled across to the bed after shutting the door. He lay for a long time, his eyes wide open in the darkness, listening to Chalkey's breath grow louder and more urgent. After what seemed an eternity, there was a great bursting groan--then silence.

Disconnected thoughts raced through his mind. He was conscious of huge significances almost within his grasp; of unmentionable ugliness and indescribable beauty. A cricket ball curled away gracefully from his fingers. The wicket-keeper turned into one of the underground manager's daughters. She sprang forward, caught it, clutched it to her breast with a look of ecstasy. The face of the woman he had danced with swam into view--the cool, rather haughty face which, paradoxically, had suggested such unself-conscious and total sexual gratification. The image changed gradually into one of her lying as the girl had in the next room a few minutes previously, and the inevitable

occurred. But it was over in a matter of moments, and with a long, shuddering sigh Anson slipped away from his untidy passions.

He fell asleep, soaked in sweat, his trousers stained and his mosquito net still tied up in a knot above his head.

## CHAPTER 7

Tosa squatted on the bare earth beside the kitchen, waiting for Anson to finish his breakfast. A scrawny chicken edged towards him, pecking busily in the dirt. It paused about three feet away, tilting its head to look up at him cautiously with one pale-yellow eye. Tosa made a grab for it, but the hen leapt away with a loud squawk and ran behind the kitchen, where it settled down to a steady, indignant cluck for several minutes. Tosa eased back on his haunches again, enjoying the warmth of the sun on his back as he watched the two houseboys carry trays up the verandah steps. He felt an odd mixture of eagerness and vitality, coupled with a sense of deprivation. It was Monday morning, the least enjoyable morning of the week; yet, somehow, since it was a beginning, it seemed to offer the promise of change and improvement. Tosa grimaced as he recalled that Anson had been away for the weekend. He would almost certainly be tired and irritable, wanting a drink every five minutes and finding fault with everything the sample gangs had or had not done. At the same time, Africans were never allowed to come back from the weekend hungover and tired, he thought bitterly. They were supposed to be refreshed, eager to rush at the job on Monday mornings.

"What sort of a mood's he in?" Tosa asked, as Amadou came back to fill the empty teapot. Amadou looked up at the sky eloquently and shook his head without replying. Tosa sighed. For more than a month now he had been waiting for a favourable opportunity to try and borrow some money off Anson. Time and again he had almost plucked up enough courage to broach the subject, but something had always gone wrong at the last moment; he had misunderstood some command or forgotten one that he did understand. It was so hard to keep one's mind on the job when a shy smile kept intruding—a slanting gleam which made his throat tighten with desire. Tosa traced a meaningless pattern in the dust with his finger and sighed again. Fifteen pounds would mean so little to Anson and so much to him. It would alter the whole course of his life; and he could pay it back in next to no time. With fifteen pounds he could get married.

Listlessly he smoothed the dust out between his legs and began to draw again, an intricate pattern of circles all intersecting each other and turning gradually, in his imagination, into a wasp's nest. But even wasps, he reflected sourly, were entitled to wives, while he had to go without. Out of a salary of nine pounds he seldom had more than a couple left at the end of the month, after he had paid his rent, fed himself and bought his clothes. He could, of course, have saved the money by now if only the girl hadn't lived a mere four huts away in the compound, where he had to pass her every evening on his way home from work. She was always there, sitting on a stool by the front door, pounding cassava or shucking mealies—or sometimes just leaning back with her head against the mud wall, dreamily watching her two younger brothers playing in the dirt road. For several weeks he had stopped every evening to talk to her. They never found very much to say to each other, but words were unimportant beside the astonishingly powerful surge of happiness, the warm, delicious glow which came over him as he looked at her. Her name was Sozu. She was fifteen, a virgin with the figure of a boy but for the small, high breasts which he had often seen from the distance when she was washing at the communal tap behind their huts. Unfortunately for Tosa, her virginity was a very tangible asset to her family and she was always called into her hut a few minutes after he arrived. Then one day, Tosa, too, was called in by her father, who laid down the terms on which he could have her. After that he was not allowed to speak to her until he could produce the money; but he could still see her every evening, flashing her shy and hopeful smile at him every time he passed.

Tosa immediately began to save every penny he could put by. He bought nothing but the cheapest food, refused to drink palm wine with his friends in the evenings and even kept away from the film show in the village on Saturday night. But by the second Saturday, his resolution wavered. An American cowboy film was being shown and he was particularly fond of cowboy films. It was only a shilling, after all, he complained to himself; and a man must have some pleasure. He finished his meagre supper, put on his second-best khaki shirt—which was only a little frayed around the collar—and set off down the road. Sozu's hut was in darkness, but as he was about to pass it he heard an unmistakable hiss. He turned in surprise and saw a faint gleam of white teeth in the doorway. "Who is it?" he asked, half-scared that she would answer. Tribal rules still prevailed when it came to virgin daughters.

"It's me," she whispered almost inaudibly. "You can come. They've



gone to the cinema."

Tosa hesitated. Desire made him catch his breath, but it was difficult to believe that she had been left entirely unguarded. In the end he looked carefully up and down the street, then stepped quickly across to the door. She touched his hand and greeted him in a small, breathless whisper, warning him to be quiet. Her brothers were asleep in the hut. Tosa touched her and she pulled away from him. "No, you mustn't," she hissed fiercely; but after a moment or two she leaned against him and broke into a soft gurgle of laughter. He looked up and down the street again, took her firmly by the wrist and led her round to the back of the hut. Tosa had no idea, afterwards, of how much time had passed before it happened. But he did recall with dreadful clarity that he had actually straddled her body, was in the very act of possessing her, when a light had suddenly appeared in the window of the hut and her father had called her, his voice shockingly loud. In one mindless bound he had grabbed up his shorts and dived into the bamboo thicket behind them. He lay bunched up, pressing himself into the dirt and quivering with fear. The least he could hope for if he was caught was a savage beating. But Sozu reacted with astonishing presence of mind. She picked up her mammy cloth and, without even pausing to put it on, walked through the back door, holding it in her hand and complaining angrily that she couldn't even go out to relieve herself without being shouted at.

Her father grunted suspiciously. "Why are you panting?" he demanded.

"Because you gave me a scare. I thought something was wrong."

Tosa raised his head cautiously and saw the father silhouetted against the light in the doorway. Then the door closed and he crept silently back to his hut.

From then on there was no question of him trying to see her again; but the episode made it impossible for him to forget her for more than an hour or two at a time. He had returned at once to strict austerity; a crash programme to save the bride price. But in the evenings when he waited for sleep to come he would lie with an erection that throbbed like a deep wound as he remembered her quick, eager movements under his hand, the husky gurgle of pleasure as his fingers moved inside her. After a week, he could stand it no longer. He got up, got dressed, and went down to Mary Wangara's to seek release with a brief, efficient consummation in the arms of one of her girls. Before he knew it, it had become a habit. The half-crowns slipped through his fingers, and by the end of the month he had nothing saved. It was a vicious circle out of which

he would never escape unless Anson agreed to lend him the money.

"He wants to see you in his room," Amadou grunted, on his way back with a trayfull of dirty crockery. Tosa stood up, took a run at the chickens, who scattered noisily in all directions, and walked round the side of the mess to Anson's room. He knocked on the screen door and observed gloomily, as he entered it, that Anson's expression was anything but friendly. He was given terse instructions for the morning's work. They were to go down the main shaft, check three of the sample crews and then come up at Kuni, which was nearly two miles away. It was going to be a hard morning, with a good deal of backtracking and climbing up and down ladderways. Tosa packed Anson's change of clothes in his haversack, went back to the fridge for his bottle of tea, and set off for the main shaft. It was half-past six and the red dust, still moist with dew, was cool and pleasant between his toes as he started to climb the hill.

But by the time he reached the road running along the top of the ridge to the main shaft, the sweat was running down his face. As he turned along it a squirrel shot across the road in front of him and scuttled up a palm tree. It sat in the crown, screeching at him vindictively. He picked up a stone and hurled it. The stone glanced off the trunk of the tree with a satisfying thwock, then landed on the corrugated-iron roof of the assay office with an even more satisfying crash, just as George and Anson came by in the car. Tosa laughed contemptuously at the African shouting at him from the assay office door and broke into a trot to make sure that he arrived at the shaft before Anson did. He could have saved himself the trouble because Anson failed to appear until nearly half an hour later. Something had delayed him in the office and he was obviously in a bad temper about it. The skip had just started for the bottom of the shaft and he cursed the bell-boy savagely for not waiting for him. The bell-boy, stung by the injustice of his complaint, answered back, and Anson threatened to report him for insolence. By the time they finally climbed into the skip, Anson was flushed with anger. Tosa sighed. This was certainly not the morning to broach the subject of his financial problems.

They got off at the 3600 level, walked a quarter of a mile along the main drive and then began to climb up into a stope. Half way up the ladder, Anson stopped. The previous day's blasting had knocked down all the two-foot ventilation piping in the raise and no one had replaced it. There would be no ventilation at all in the stope and it would be unbearably hot. He signalled

to Tosa to go down again. When they reached the drive, Anson switched off the big electric fan and told him to go back up and fetch the drilling crew to reassemble the vent pipes.

"Stupid bastards've got no air at all up there," Anson snapped. "They'll be choking in dust."

"Yo, massa," said Tosa, only half-understanding, but knowing the uproar that would break out when he tried to stop the drills. He pointed to the valve on the four-inch air main and drew his finger across his throat.

"Be plenty palaver. You go stoppem?"

"Yeah, okay," Anson grunted. "You go on up--I'll shut it off before you get there."

It took nearly half an hour of argument and threats before Anson could force the drill crew to work on the pipes, which were slung from eye-bolts in the hanging wall with baling wire. Bulky and difficult to handle, they kept breaking off below just as a higher section had been successfully mated and clamped together. Some were distorted and had to be taken right down and hammered back into shape. Tosa had to go all the way back to the stores by the shaft for some more wire, and he ended up by doing most of the work himself because the drill crew were sulky about the loss of time, which meant a loss of footage bonus to them. Anson sat above them on the ladderway, refusing to allow anyone into the stope until the pipes had been fixed. The temperature was steadily increasing and he grew more and more angry because there was no sign of the sample crew yet.

At last the fan was turned on and the drilling began again. Tosa followed Anson back down into the drive, handed him a drink, and watched him anxiously. He had spoken to the sample crew on his trip to the stores. They were sitting in a cross-cut only a few hundred yards from the shaft. They had agreed to give the drilling crew at least an hour's start, then do the sampling as quickly as possible while they rested. When he had told them about the ventilation pipes, they had decided to wait another thirty minutes or so.

"Well, where the hell are they?" Anson demanded.

"Massa?"

"Don't massa me. You know bloody well what I mean. Where's Busota and his crew?"

"Me no savvy, massa."

Anson ran the rim of his hand down his face, shook off the sweat and

looked around for something to sit on. "Go and find them," he sighed.

"They go come, by-m-by."

"Yes—and so'll Christmas. I've a damn good mind to dock them a day's pay to smarten them up. Go on, we're not going to sit here all day waiting for them."

Tosa slid the bottle back into his haversack, which he had hung on the water valve. He was just about to start off down the drive when he saw lights appear round the bend. He grunted with relief. He was tired already and it was going to be a long day.

"They go come, massa," he said, squatting down gratefully a few yards away from Anson.

Anson picked up his lamp and shone it in Busota's face as he came up to him. "And where the bloody hell have you been?" he demanded.

"Massa, we go for wrong place," he replied with a self-deprecatory smile. "Be Monday. I no go think proper."

Tosa listened with vague resentment to Anson snarling at Busota. He felt a familiar irritation over the white man's fanatic approach to work; and to their double standard. But most particularly he resented Anson's refusal to allow anyone to use their own judgement. They weren't children, after all, and Busota had made perfectly reasonable arrangements with the boss boy of the drill crew so that they could both do their jobs with the least inconvenience to either of them. Yet this didn't satisfy Anson. Even on a Monday morning, he evidently expected everyone to sprint to work. And he was growing worse, too, as time passed; more impatient and more demanding every day. He seldom paused to crack a joke with the drill crews as he had done a few months ago, or sat down to gossip with one of the European shiftbosses.

Busota finally took his crew up the ladderway into the stope and another fierce argument broke out as Anson shut off the air valve for the second time. The boss boy came scrambling down the ladderway, ran over to Anson and began to shout at him, waving a threatening finger in his face. Tosa's heart sank as Anson stood up. A fight would leave him in a hopeless position. If he didn't intervene, Anson would probably fire him; if he did, he would certainly get beaten up in the compound afterwards. He blew out his cheeks in relief as the boss boy backed away and went to sit with the rest of his crew, who were squatting along the wall of the drive, their voices rising in shrill spasms of complaint over the whine of the ventilation fan. Tosa shook his head and smiled to himself at the thought of approaching Anson with

his problems today. Yet at the same time, he felt a certain kinship with him because Anson, too, was badly in need of a woman. His refusal to have one had perplexed the servants. They had discussed the implications time after time, even speculated about his virility. But they had soon dismissed the possibility of impotence because, according to Amadou, the condition of his sheets testified to a healthy incidence of wet dreams--or perhaps even masturbation, a recourse which Tosa found difficult to believe of a white man with plenty of money. Anson could afford the most attractive virgins in the village.

A light flashed in his eyes and Tosa looked up to see that Anson was on his feet. He stood up and went across to him. They were going back into the same stope to check Busota, then on up to the next level and out to the western extremity of the mine to check another sample crew there before making their way to a new development raise near Kuni shaft. It was a long walk, with nearly fifteen hundred feet of ladderways to climb up and down. Tosa retrieved the haversack off the valve and set off after Anson up the ladderway with a sigh.

When they reached the next stope, Anson was for once satisfied; the face had been correctly marked, the sample crew was cutting adequate samples. He sat on an empty dynamite box after he had examined it, waiting for the sweat to stop running down his face so that he could light a cigarette. For the first time that morning he smiled at Tosa as he handed back the bottle of tea. The god of work had been temporarily propitiated, and Tosa wandered away to gossip with a tracklaying crew who were replacing rotten sleepers in the driveway. He had barely reached them when an African came jogging down the drive, shouting that there had been an accident on the next ladderway. He was too breathless to give any coherent details, and Tosa ran back to tell Anson.

Anson threw away his cigarette with a grimace, picked up his lamp and set off down the driveway at a fast trot. He pushed through the wooden ventilation door with Tosa close behind him and looked up the ladderway. There was a cluster of lamps about a hundred feet up it and, despite the howl of the ventilation fan right beside them, they could hear an excited chorus of shouts. Anson stepped across to the switch box and shut off the fan.

"Ask them what's happened," he said, looking a little warily up the ladderway, afraid that something might come crashing down on them. Tosa

shouted a query and half a dozen excited voices answered him. It was very difficult to make out what had happened, but eventually he discovered that somebody had his leg trapped on the skidway.

"I suppose we'll have to go up there," said Anson, looking doubtfully up at the lights.

"I go see."

Anson glanced at him, seemed on the point of agreeing, then changed his mind and set off up the steps. When they arrived, Anson had to shout at the top of his lungs to make himself heard above the excited chatter of the group of Africans. It was a rigging crew. They had been lowering a twelve foot steel H-beam for a grizzly down the skidway with the electric hoist. The beam had gradually angled across the skidway until the bottom end had dug into the side of the ladderway and jammed it. The boy who was trapped had stepped out onto one of the six by six sleepers which stretched across the raise, and were bolted to eyebolts driven into the sidewalls. They provided support for both the skidway and the ladderway. The boy had pried the beam loose with a crowbar, but unfortunately nobody had thought to take up the slack in the hoist cable which had inevitably resulted when the beam jammed. The beam had promptly slid two or three feet down and trapped his leg in the angle between the planks of the skidway and the six by six. He lay along the sleeper, his eyes screwed shut in a grimace of pain and terror. But nobody was taking any notice of him; the five Africans in the crew were all shouting recriminations at each other.

Anson climbed over the handrail and stepped carefully onto the sleeper below him. He reached up and gripped him by one wrist. The boy turned a frightened face to him.

"How be you?" Anson asked. "Your leg go for break?"

"No savvy, massa. Me no feelum."

"Mmm—probably is, then." Tosa, who had scrambled out beside Anson, bent with him to look at the boy's leg. It was trapped just below the knee, but there was no visible sign of damage—it didn't even appear to be twisted. He saw Anson look up at the beam. The chokers were still in place, gripping it at the top end. The bottom had dug into the sleeper so that it couldn't possibly move. Just a slight pull on the hoist would straighten it up enough to free the boy's leg. Tosa was just beginning to wonder why nobody had thought of this when Anson bellowed at the crew to stop talking for the third time. They turned to look at him sulkily, still bursting into spasmodic

accusations, like children reluctant to abandon a good argument.

"Who's the boss boy?" Anson demanded.

"Yo, massa." He was a middle-aged, rather spidery-looking Ga, with deep tribal scars on his cheeks.

Anson shone his light on his face and shook his head. He turned to Tosa.

"Make you tell the boy top-side to pullem softly-softly," he said. "You savvy, softly-softly?"

After a shouted conversation with the boy on the hoist, the hoist began to hum, gently taking up the slack in the cable as Tosa pointed his lamp up the raise and described slow circles with it. The cable grew taut, and finally, with a harsh creak, the beam began to move.

"Whoa!" shouted Anson, flashing his light sideways. The hoist stopped at once and Tosa looked down at the boy. He lay with his eyes closed, motionless. Tosa shook him by the shoulder and he opened his eyes, an expression of utter hopelessness on his face.

"Try moving your leg," Tosa suggested.

The boy sat up slowly on the sleeper and gazed fearfully at his leg. He lifted it up an inch or two, let it drop again, then suddenly scrambled to his feet and scampered with remarkable agility along the sleeper and over the guardrail. A great shout of laughter went up from the rigging crew. They beat each other on the back, laughed, pointed to the boy who had been trapped, and then doubled over with laughter again. Anson turned to look at Tosa incredulously before climbing back onto the ladderway himself.

"Good Christ," he grumbled. "And you blokes are screaming for your independence!"

"Massa?"

"Nothing, nothing. Give me a drink and let's get to hell out of here."

It was almost noon before they reached the development raise. Tosa breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the sample grooves across the face. They were so deep that not even Anson could complain; and since the drillers were already lowering the jackhammer down the raise, there was no argument this time.

"Give me the steel tape," said Anson. "Might as well check their measurements while we're here."

"Massa, you go catchum."

"Me?" Anson patted the pockets of his sodden shorts and shook his head. "No, I haven't got it."

"You go catchum for first place stope."

"Bullshit. I gave it back to you after I'd used it."

Tosa looked down suddenly as he remembered that Anson had in fact given it back to him. He had put it down while he reorganized the contents of the haversack, then forgotten to pick it up again. Just his luck. Now Anson, whose mood had improved so much since the episode with the beam on the ladderway that he had been contemplating broaching the subject of a loan, would fly into a rage.

"Aiee, be so, massa. I go forgetum," he admitted sadly.

Anson kicked some fragments of rock out of the way and sat down on the wooden drilling platform with his back to the wall. "What's the matter with you these days, Tosa?" he asked, wiping his fingers on the front of his shirt and taking a cigarette out of the flat, waterproof tin he carried in his breast pocket. "Why you go forget, forget, all time? You in love, or something?"

Tosa looked at him uncertainly. He had never been able to make out just what the white man meant when he talked about love. Anson noticed his hesitation, chuckled, and rephrased the question in more physiological terms.

"Yo, be so," said Tosa, looking up hopefully. "Plenty humbug. I not catch jig-jig at all. No catchum wife."

"Why's that? You no seeum wife be fit for you?"

"Yo massa. I go see number one wife."

"But she no like you, eh?"

"No be so. She like me too much. I no catch money."

"Ah, yes, the old problem...."

"Massa," Tosa burst out, "you fit lend me fifteen pound? I go payem back one time."

"Fifteen...! Fuck you," said Anson indignantly. "I'm not getting any-- why the hell should I subsidize your sex life?"

Tosa shrugged and gazed despondently at his feet. He understood only that Anson was refusing and knew he had been a fool to expect any other response.

"Why you no go saveum?" Anson asked indifferently, looking down at his cigarette which was already soggy with sweat. He flicked it down the raise and stood up. "Come on, we better get moving. They'll be starting to blast in another twenty minutes."



## CHAPTER 8

When he arrived at his office on Monday evening, Anson found the four committee members of the Ex-Servicemen's Association waiting for him in the corridor. They were all dressed in cheap, badly cut European suits and they looked so much like a group of incompetent actors, wearing period costumes and feeling angrily self-conscious about it, that he had to stifle an inclination to burst out laughing. Instead, he greeted them soberly, wishing, as he led them into his office, that they would wear their own clothes. They looked so much more dignified in the robes of an African tribesman.

The room had been prepared for the meeting. Another table had been put in front of Anson's to form a T. Each chair had a pad and pencil, a glass of water and an ashtray in front of it, and the setting looked impressively board-roomish except for the lizards, who had come out to hunt the moths and flying ants congregating around the single electric light bulb in the middle of the ceiling. He had to resist the temptation to laugh again as he saw the Africans jockeying to avoid the two seats at the bottom of the table. In the end some sort of hierarchy prevailed. Amanquah and Dunkwah took the two top seats; Krosa, a very black and dour-looking clerk from the stores, the one at the bottom, to the right of Anson; and Muru, an African he had never seen before, sat down opposite him.

"Let me see, now," said Anson. "Dunkwah and Amanquah I know, of course. And Krosa, you're in stores, aren't you?"

"Yes sah."

"So obviously you must be Muru." Anson turned to him. "I don't recall seeing you before?"

"Sah, I am working timekeeper for night shift."

"Ah, that explains it. All right, gentlemen. If we're all ready, we might as well get on with it. I declare this meeting open. Mr. Secretary, will you please begin by reading the minutes of the last meeting?" Anson lit a cigarette and sat back in his chair as Dunkwah shuffled the papers he had brought with him importantly.

"The question was discussing of Mistah...."

"May we have the record of who was present at the meeting, first?"

Anson interrupted.

Dunkwah looked at him sullenly. "Everyone is dere," he said.

Muru shook his head. "No sah, I was not coming." Anson glanced at Krosa and Amanquah. Both shook their heads and he turned back to Dunkwah.

"Everyone, then, seems to have been yourself and Mr. Seagar--which is not a quorum. Therefore, you did not hold a committee meeting at all."

Dunkwah shrugged. "Other mens not have time."

"Rubbish. You didn't ask them, did you?" Dunkwah sat looking sulkily at the sheet of paper in his hand without replying. "All right," Anson went on, "let's begin by recording that we do have a properly constituted committee meeting this time. Write down the names, please."

Dunkwah picked up the pencil and took a very long time about it. The others were clearly amused at his discomfiture and Anson resisted the temptation to tell him to hurry up.

"Now, let's hear what you and Mr. Seagar discussed in your private meeting?" he suggested, when Dunkwah had finished.

"We talking of an hon--of an honorum for Mr. Seagar."

"A what? Surely you don't mean an honorarium?"

"Yes, sah. Mr. Seagar want moneys for the job."

"But for God's sake, he never did...." Anson checked himself. "And I suppose, of course, you suggested one for yourself, too?"

"Yes, sah."

"I think it is right all committee mens should be paid," said Amanquah abruptly, and there was a murmur of agreement round the table.

"Now listen to me," said Anson grimly. "You people are all getting hot under the collar about self-government, right? And the first thing you're going to have to learn is that when you get yourself elected, you don't set out to put all the funds of the institution that elects you into your own pockets. In other words, you've got to learn responsibility." Anson paused, annoyed that he sounded so pompous. "It is sometimes customary to pay the secretary a small fee--but the rest of us will be serving purely voluntarily." He looked around at them, wondering if he should try to repeat what he had said in pigeon. "Do you all understand what I'm saying?"

Obviously they did, and he felt an angry resentment at the blank hostility in their faces. Why not let them run their silly little association

into the ground and forget all about it? he reflected. What, after all, did it matter to him if a stupid bunch of coons allowed the company to collect their fees so that these seedy crooks could divide them up amongst themselves? To his surprise, he realized that he did mind a good deal.

He turned to Dunkwah again. "So what did you and Mr. Seagar decide? It makes very little difference, of course, because something like this would have to be approved at a general meeting."

"Mr. Seagar take five hundred pound, sah."

"Five...! You're joking."

"No sah. We are writing cheque."

"You mean to say you actually made out a cheque?"

"Yes sah."

Anson began to laugh, then suddenly remembered Seagar's nervousness when he had spoken to him on the verandah of his bungalow. He sat up and reached for the telephone. Emery, the bank manager, was not at home. Anson tried the European club in the village. He was playing bridge and there was a long wait while the steward fetched him.

"Oh yes, old boy," he apologised. "I tried to catch you on Saturday after we spoke, but you'd left for Obuassi...and it slipped my mind today. Seagar came in with a cheque for five hundred quid just before he left on the train."

"Good God, I hope you didn't cash it?"

"Well, it was a perfectly legal cheque, countersigned by the Secretary-Treasurer."

"You did cash it, then?"

"No. Luckily there are some pretty tricky currency regulations and I baffled him. Looked smelly to me. He was pretty shaky—badly hungover, so I didn't even have to give him a receipt...told him the money'd be paid into his account in the U.K."

"Can you sit on it for a day or two?"

"Yes, but I'd like to get it off my hands as soon as possible. Could be messy, you know, if somebody started to ask questions. I'm not exactly following the rules."

"Yes, of course. It's very good of you. I'll be down to see you as soon as I can make it tomorrow morning."

"And I presume you want me to do the same with the other one, too?"

"What other one?"

"Dunkwah, the Secretary, came in with a cheque for two-fifty this morning."

"Well I'm buggered!"

Emery chuckled. "Not yet, old boy. I told him I wanted to speak to you about it first. He's an insolent bastard. Started to kick up a shindy, so I threatened to call the police and he sheered off. His cheque's in the safe with Seagar's."

"Remind me to buy you a drink next time I see you—several drinks, in fact. I'm at a committee meeting now. I'll get this thrashed out and come down in the morning. Thanks a hell of a lot for what you've done."

"No sweat, old boy. Have fun."

Anson put the phone down and began to write aimlessly on his pad to give himself time to think. 500 + 250 = 750. 1400 - 750 = 650. Seagar is a thieving slut.... But why the hell didn't he go for broke and take a thousand? he wondered curiously. Anson Payne, he added in his neat script. Kuwassi, Gold Coast, West Africa, South--Northern Hemisphere, The World, The Universe. He remembered how often he had inscribed similar pointless catalogues in his books at prep-school, and one particular occasion when old Panton caught him doing it when he should have been reading about Cromwell and the regicide. Panton never struck anyone; he merely ground his knuckles into their heads, just behind the ear. It was a peculiarly humiliating device because, even though it didn't hurt all that much, it brought the tears to one's eyes. But the memory of Panton brought a sharper distress in its wake, a stinging sense of corruption. He had been so—so immaculate, somehow; so immune from anger or greed or.... What would he have thought of Seagar? Anson wondered bleakly. Or worse still, of Saturday night in Obuassi; of the girl lying on the carpet, exposing herself to the eyes of one of the pupils he had hoped to civilize?

Anson sat up, uncertain and hesitant for the first time. Seagar had undermined his confidence. He had destroyed the illusion Anson was striving to preserve—an illusion of white integrity. "Well, gentlemen," he said ironically, "it seems that your past-president wrote himself a cheque for five hundred pounds." Anson paused briefly, but no one seemed unduly disturbed. "And Dunkwah, here, awarded himself two hundred and fifty."

This time there was no need to pause. He was interrupted by a burst of noisy recrimination in Fanti. He looked at them contemptuously. One didn't need to understand what they were saying to realize that they had agreed to divide up the funds amongst themselves.

"All right, that's enough," said Anson. But the argument went on undiminished, and in the end he smashed his hand down on the table.

"Shut up!" he roared, and a sullen silence descended on the room. "To begin with, since I don't speak Fanti, all discussion at these meetings will be in English. Secondly, nobody on this committee can accept any of the Association's money unless it has been authorized by the members in a general meeting. Therefore, both these cheques I've mentioned will be torn up...."

"No be so," Dunkwah burst out. "Cheque for me is proper. General members will approve."

Anson opened his tin of cigarettes and shook one out. "That remains to be seen. Personally, I doubt very much if they will when they discover that their money is being deducted from their pay so that you can pocket it."

"Will be approve," said Dunkwah, with arrogant confidence. "Members no come to meeting."

"Oh? I think they may if I tell some of them what's been going on."

"They no come," Dunkwah repeated, but with less assurance.

"You make it sound very much as though you are going to threaten them in some way. And if that turns out to be the case, I shall do two things: I shall consult Mr. Chard, the Superintendant of Police; and I shall ask the management to suspend all payroll deductions immediately."

Anson reached into his pocket for his lighter and lit his cigarette as he waited for a response. None came. Out of the corner of his eye he saw one of the lizards dart forward and grab a moth on the ceiling. Faintly he could hear the bell ringing in the hoist-house, then the accelerating whine of the drum as it began to haul the first skips of ore to the surface. The night shift had begun to produce. He struggled with an overpowering sense of the absurd as he looked around at the sullen committee members. They had so obviously been counting the spoils; and now they sat like disappointed children, dressed in their party best and condemned to a dull party without any ice cream.

"I suggest, then, that we table the question of honorariums—or payments to committee members—and discuss it at the next general meeting... whenever we decide to hold that."

Nobody replied. "Will someone please propose it?" Anson demanded sharply. Still there was no response. He sat looking at them, the smoke from his cigarette curling up to float against the ceiling. Amanquah dropped his

pencil and Muru leaned down past the end of the table to do up a shoe lace. The silence became oppressive, but finally Amanquah looked up at Anson.

"Thank you, Amanquah. Mr. Secretary, will you record that Amanquah has proposed that the question of emoluments for committee members be tabled." Anson wrote it down on his pad. "May I have a seconder, please?"

This time the pause was much briefer. Krosa held up his hand.

"Incidentally, I take it you all understand what is meant by tabling?"

"We have all been committee mens," Dunkwah replied contemptuously, and it occurred to Anson that they probably knew a good deal more about committee procedures than he did.

"Okay," he said. "Now let's get down to some of these outstanding applications for loans...." He looked up in surprise. Almost before he had finished speaking, they were holding up sheets of paper.

"I have one here, sah," said Muru, handing it up the table to Anson. Amanquah and Krosa promptly followed suit.

"Er, yes--well, they'll have to go to the bottom of the pile. We've got more than enough already to occupy us for tonight. Are these personal applications, by the way? I mean, are they requests for loans for yourselves? Because if so, of course, the same thing applies--they'll have to be approved at a general meeting."

A chorus of indignant denials broke out round the table.

"For Christ's sake shut up!" Anson shouted. "What the hell do you think this is--a charity benefit for committee members?" He held up the sheaf of papers in front of him. "I've got nearly a dozen applications for loans here--one of them more than a year old, and that's what we're going to deal with first...."

"Committee is deciding which one first," said Dunkwah furiously.

"Wrong, my friend. I, as chairman, decide on the agenda, and we're going to deal first of all with an application by Pemba Nkoro, one of Mr. Gilby's timber boys. His leg was crushed in an accident underground two years ago and he wants fifty pounds to buy tools and set up as a carpenter. I've looked into his case today. According to both his shiftboss and Mr. Hampton, his mine captain, he has an excellent record. He was honourably discharged after three years in the Army. He is a member in good standing--so it seems to me that we have no possible grounds for refusing him. Does anyone disagree?"

"Yes sah." Dunkwah sat up and looked at Anson triumphantly. "He can not be carpenter. He is not being union man."

Anson sighed. "What bloody union?"

"The Carpenter Union."

"Oh yes, you're secretary of that too, aren't you? And I suppose you've been running it the way you have this. Well firstly, it'll be time enough for this Pemba lad to worry about joining a union after he's got his tools. And, in any case, the question of union membership has nothing to do with us. Are there any more so-called objections?"

"He can not have moneys if he is not being union man," Dunkwah repeated savagely.

On the point of losing his temper again, Anson paused as an interesting idea occurred to him. He pulled the three applications he had just been handed from the bottom of the pile. The top one was Muru's. It was a request for a hundred pounds to set up as a blacksmith.

"Tell me, Muru," he asked pleasantly, "do you belong to the blacksmith's union?"

"No sah."

Anson glanced at the other two. Krosa wanted to start a bicycle repair shop and Amanquah a letter-answering service for illiterate tribesmen who needed to correspond with their relatives in the bush. He handed them to Dunkwah with a smile.

"Evidently we won't need to take these to a general meeting, then. You've just disqualified yourselves from getting a loan." He put out his cigarette and sat back. "Now let's get to a vote on this first application. Who is in favour of granting it?"

After another long pause three hands were reluctantly raised. Only Dunkwah refrained; he sat glowering sullenly.

"Will you record the vote, Mr. Secretary," Anson snapped. "I intend to inform the membership that you refused this loan--and why you refused it."

Anson made a note on his pad, and while he was doing so came to a sudden decision to force through all the applications, regardless of their merits. He met no further resistance until he suggested that the cheques should be made out and signed on the spot.

"I have no cheques book," said Dunkwah immediately.

Anson smiled. "Where do you keep it--under your mattress?"

"Sah?"

"Never mind. Bring the cheque book to me tomorrow--I'll look after it in future." Anson pulled open the drawer of his desk and brought out his

own cheque book. "This'll do for now." He passed it, together with the applications, to Dunkwah. "Just write 'Ex-Serviceman's Association' where it says account."

Dunkwah sat for a long time without moving.

"What's the matter?" Anson demanded. "Don't you have a pen, either?"

Dunkwah opened the cheque book sulkily and began to write. When they had finally been completed and countersigned by Anson, he locked them in his desk drawer with the cheque book. "I want you to have a brief letter for each of these men ready by tomorrow afternoon--a letter telling them they've been granted a loan. The object of this association was to help people returning from the services to rehabilitate themselves--to find work or start a business of their own. It's a bit late now, but once it becomes known that some people have actually been granted loans, we'll probably get a flood of applications. We'll deal with them at the next meeting. The sooner we get all this money out of the bank and doing some good the better."

Anson laughed at the expressions of disbelief around the table. "Yes, gentlemen, the money is going where it belongs--to the members...and not into your pockets. Now, the constitution calls for one month's notice before a general meeting. So we'll call one for Tuesday, one month from tomorrow. Has anyone any objections?"

No one spoke. "Good. And now, is there any other business?" Anson waited a moment or two, then picked up his tin of cigarettes. "In that case, I declare this meeting closed. I'll see you all here in two weeks at the same time."

After he had ushered them out and locked his office door, Anson walked down the road to the club. For a little while he felt a glow of satisfaction at the way he had handled the meeting--at the ease with which he had outsmarted them. But his exhilaration was short-lived, quickly replaced by a revulsion against the bare-faced self-interest he had just witnessed. And unfortunately he couldn't just dismiss it as typical coon greed. It was a question of degree, really. The Africans were less subtle in disguising their acquisitiveness than the Europeans--except for a slob like Seagar, of course, who was simply a common thief. A piccanin plodded by, carrying a meal of dried fish and yams in a bowl on his head--a meal for his father on shift in the hoist-house. He looked back with wide, inquiring eyes as Anson chuckled harshly. Anson was visualizing Seagar's rage when he discovered the money wasn't going to come through. He would have given a good deal to meet Seagar just once more.



George Pemberton was about to leave the club as Anson walked up the steps. "I suppose we won't be seeing much of you in the club after this week, sir?" said Anson with a smile. George's wife was due out on Wednesday.

"Oh, I don't know about that," he replied. "I've no intention of giving up my sundowner in the club of an evening. At least, not without a fight." He turned towards the steps, then paused. "By the way, don't plan on going underground in the morning. I want to have a chat with you. We're running into a problem with ore reserves."

"Oh, good—I mean, not about the ore reserves. But I was going to ask you for an hour or two to go down and see Emery, the bank manager."

"By all means. I'll see you after breakfast."

Anson turned to see the doctor sitting by himself at a table, gesturing eagerly. He had obviously been hoping someone would turn up when George left. It had reached the stage, thought Anson, depressed by the idea, where he could neither bring himself to leave the club, nor wanted to be seen drinking alone. Anson ordered a double Scotch and soda from the steward before he sat down. Reggie Thornton pulled a face.

"Bad as that?" he asked.

"Yeah," said Anson, scratching the mosquito bites on his wrist. "It was pretty nauseating. They were all set to divide up the funds amongst themselves. Lots of palaver and hostility when I put a spoke in their wheel."

"You fixed 'em up proper, eh?"

"I suppose so. But somehow I felt a bit—a bit uncomfortable about it. Too easy."

The doctor shook his head. "I was afraid so," he sighed. "You're an insecure empire builder. The genuine ones like George never feel uneasy. That's what makes them so effective. But you lack the arrogance of faith, and this bunch you've just sat on will know it. They'll keep after you. In fact, I'm willing to bet there's another meeting going on right now—they'll be discussing how to undermine you."

"Let 'em. I'll fix their duff. I wouldn't mind so much if their attempts to rob the piggy bank were a little less obvious. But they're so crude and greedy about it."

"That's an intriguing morality—stealing's okay if it's accomplished in style?"

"Oh, shut up! You know perfectly well what I mean."

"Of course I do. You want to enjoy the privileges of being a white

man without having to face any awkward facts."

"Balls! You didn't see this bunch in action. They're hopelessly corrupt. And these are the bastards who're doing all the screaming about self-government. You can just see what's going to happen if they ever get it—they'll regard taxes as a kitty to be split up amongst the boys. Then they'll all start squabbling about who gets the biggest cut and who's the biggest wheel."

"And you're suggesting that this is peculiar to Africans?"

Anson looked away. "Not entirely," he shrugged. "But at least there are some Europeans you can trust."

"You don't believe, then, that every man has his price?"

"What about George Pemberton? I don't think anyone could buy him."

The doctor laughed and turned to snap his fingers for the steward. "Let's change the subject. Tell me about your weekend in Obuassi. George said you seemed depressed today?"

"Oh, we won. Wasn't a bad game."

Anson was still scratching his wrists and the doctor looked down at them disapprovingly. "How did you manage to get so badly bitten?" he asked.

"The usual. Got sloshed and forgot to pull down the mosquito net."

"Who'd you stay with?"

"Bloke called Chalkey White—Cousin Jack shiftboss."

"And what depressed you?"

"Nothing in particular. But it was all a bit sordid. They had a mammy party in the bungalow on Saturday night, and I didn't go much on it."

The doctor paused to sign the bar chit after the steward had put their drinks down in front of them. "You're very reticent about it. What happened?"

"They made a girl strip out and one of them screwed her in front of everyone. I thought it was pretty squalid."

Reggie picked up his drink and sipped it thoughtfully. "Haven't you ever been tempted to sleep with one of them?" he asked.

"Yes, of course I have. But not enough to do it."

"I know what your trouble is—no Faust in you. Might do you a world of good to bang one of them. Send her to me first. I'll make sure she's clean."

"Jesus Christ," said Anson. "You really make it sound romantic."

## CHAPTER 9

On Wednesday evening virtually the entire European population of the mine gathered in the club to meet and inspect George's wife. He had been so uncommunicative about her they were consumed with curiosity; their speculations ranged all the way from a bony and forbidding spinster to a lissom child bride. Numerous bets had been wagered on the outcome of her age and appearance, and there was a curious blending of the festive and the hostile about the occasion. The women were dressed to kill. Sharp, feline and malicious, they waited to assess the challenge, and the atmosphere of alert expectation flickered round the shabby lounge like a chameleon's tongue. They sat in threes and fours and talked about the servants and the heat and the new consignment of dress material in the Indian store; and their husbands sat between them or lounged against the bar, drinking steadily.

Anson, who was still irritable after a bad round of golf, sat with the doctor and his wife. The events of the past few days had unsettled him and, in any case, he felt a sharp distaste for the predatory atmosphere which surrounded him. He had fully intended to remain in his bungalow after supper to read; but the selfsame curiosity he found contemptible in others was too much for him in the end. He came, and now sat looking around at the company without even the benefit of feeling superior to them. His eye kept falling on Murial Cooper, the underground manager's wife. She was a thin, aggressive woman, constantly on the alert for any erosion of social priorities. It was she who had most to fear from George's wife, and just at the time when she was in need of all her resources, her husband let her down. Bert Cooper was still four or five years from retirement, but the growing certainty of trouble with the Africans unnerved him. He spoke openly of the necessity to get out while the going was good--of the dangers of massacre and bloodshed. Others were quick to respond with accusations of cowardice; there was much talk of rats leaving sinking ships, and Murial suddenly found herself an object of distinctly spiteful commiseration. She sat now, stiffly defensive, with an unmistakable flush on her normally sallow cheeks. Somehow, she represented to

Anson all the inconsequence and sterility of his present existence. And he could no longer take refuge in the sense of detachment which comforted him when he first arrived.

He drank his beer without appetite, wishing he could break out of the introspective mood he had fallen into these past few weeks. More and more often he found himself regretting the uncomplicated wartime years. It had been, as the doctor loved to point out, an easy war. Hitler represented such a tangible evil that no one in Anson's circle of experience suffered any doubts or hesitations. Now, suddenly, he found himself questioning almost every conviction which seemed so satisfyingly unambiguous in the past. When he arrived on the mine he regarded it as a simple fact that Africans were backward and that generations must elapse before they could hope to be as civilized as he was. But during the past few weeks the meaning of civilization had suddenly become less clear—and the implications of enlightened self-interest far more untenable.

He tilted his glass and gazed moodily at the residue of froth in the bottom of it. It was a little frightening to find himself wondering all at once whether he was in fact superior to an African; or even whether his once secure vision of civilization did represent an advance. He was brought up to believe that history was progressive; a sort of straight line of human events and social improvements leading to some unspecified utopia. The first crack in this comfortable outlook appeared immediately after the war, when he saw the photographs and newsreels of the Nazi concentration camps. At the time he had been more or less successful in ignoring the implications on simple racial grounds: a single, and singularly evil race was responsible. But in brief unguarded moments he would remember that he had unhesitatingly bombed cities full of defenceless people when ordered to. Culpability, then, was only a matter of degree and circumstance. A faint but appallingly ugly question about what he would have done if ordered to slam those oven doors in Buchenwald or Dachow still lingered in his mind. And for reasons which were still not very clear to him, the episode in Chalkey's bungalow in Obuassi had resurrected all his doubts with extraordinary vividness.

The steward came to their table with another round of drinks the doctor had ordered. The Pembertons were so late it began to look as though they weren't coming. For a while the peculiar sensation of timelessness a warm tropical night sometimes engenders descended on everyone. Nobody in the room had spoken for several minutes. The only sound was the soft, implacable flutter

of moths and the occasional heavy thud of a stag beetle against the wire-mesh screens on the windows.

"Must have funk'd it," the doctor chuckled, his voice suddenly ringing out in the silent room. "Try not to look so disappointed, my dear."

Two or three people laughed and a buzz of conversation arose. "I'm not disappointed," his wife snapped. "In fact, I'm not even interested. She'll probably turn out to be some sluttish barmaid George picked up in a London pub. I just...." Betty broke off and her eyes snapped into focus on the door. She looked, in the moment before Anson turned away from her, like a gun-dog frozen at the point.

George ushered his wife through the door. The quick flurry of conversation ceased as abruptly as it had begun. As she looked around the room, Anson glanced at the women and smiled to himself at the blank dismay in their faces. Their worst, their most gloomy expectations were fulfilled. She was stunningly pretty. And, as if that weren't bad enough, she had chosen to wear white for the occasion: a plain white dress, cut with the simplicity that costs a great deal of money. But she avoided any suggestion of austerity with a thin scarlet belt and a hibiscus flower which matched it almost perfectly pinned just below her left shoulder. She was carrying a cigarette case and a lighter in one hand, and her handkerchief was tucked under a slim gold bracelet. She looked cool and crisp, almost painfully desirable, as she walked across the floor. When she passed beneath the light, Anson realized that she was at least fifteen years younger than George and he was seized, all at once, with a totally illogical sense of outrage.

"My oath," grunted the doctor appreciatively, "what a scrumptious bit of crumpet!"

Sitting waiting for her to reach their table, Anson's anger turned to confusion. What on earth, he wondered helplessly, could have prompted such an extraordinarily attractive girl to marry an old fool like George? The women must be right. She was probably a plumber's daughter, with an accent you could cut with a knife.

But there was to be no solution to the dilemma that night. Daphne Pemberton's accent was as flawless as her husband's; and she acknowledged the introductions to the people who came across to their table to meet her with just the right mixture of diffidence and poise.

"Oh dear, I shall never be able to remember all these names," she sighed, smoothing her dress under her thighs as she sat down. The supple

whisper reached out into the gloomy room and Anson found that the palms of his hands were tingling.

"Ah, but you will," replied the doctor confidently. "And in a couple of months you'll wish you'd never heard them."

"How depressing. Do you think that's true?" she appealed to Anson, turning on him two grey eyes so large and beautiful that his head swam.

"Of course not. Reggie's our resident cynic. Nobody but his patients ever listen to him--and then only when they're very sick."

Anson was disappointed when she turned away without replying. The conversation became general. In the next hour nearly everyone in the room came across to talk to her. Each asked about her trip out, and each asked her whether or not she thought she was going to like living in Kuwassi. In spite of the monotony of the questions she managed to appear interested. She had the gift of seeming more concerned with the person than the question, and it was very flattering. Anson sat watching her out of the corner of his eye. She was not quite as strikingly beautiful as he had thought when she came through the door. There was a suggestion of flatness about her nostrils and her mouth was just a shade too large. In fact, there was a distinct hint of the monkey about her face, Anson realized with a sidelong glance of surprise. But these were imperfections which only made her more attractive. And she had the same air of cool chastity as the girl he danced with in Obuassi: a physical remoteness which somehow made any secret visions of sexuality almost unbearably stimulating.

Yet in spite of the apparent candour with which she answered all the questions she was asked, Anson and the doctor discovered after she left that they had learned very little about her. She mentioned a village in Sussex which neither of them knew but offered no hints about her father's occupation or the circumstances of her upbringing.

The doctor shook his head. "Can't see it," he grumbled.

"What?"

"A smashing bit of stuff like that being satisfied with George for very long."

"How the hell did he manage it?"

"Any number of reasons--an over protective family; rebounding from a love affair that went wrong...."

"I don't see what's so exciting about her," said Betty irritably.

"Big sheep's eyes."

"Not to mention big, delicious tits," the doctor chuckled.

"They won't last. She's the type who turns dry and skinny in the tropics."

The doctor glanced at his wife and Anson saw the flicker of pain in his eyes. "Perhaps," he agreed, "but in the meantime it'll liven things up no end. With a woman like her in a dump like this there are all sorts of excitingly evil things to look forward to. Anson's beginning to look moody already."

Anson grinned. "Not for me thanks. He's the kind of bloke who really would take a horsewhip to you...and you know damn well he wouldn't miss if he took a pot shot at you when you were diving out of the bedroom window."

"Well, if you two want to sit and discuss her like a couple of hot and sticky adolescents, you can—I'm going home."

"Let's have one for the ditch," the doctor suggested promptly.

"Not for me, thanks," said Anson quickly, forestalling an angry outburst from Betty. "I still haven't recovered from last weekend."

It quickly became apparent that George's marriage was not going to disrupt his routine. He still dropped into the club for his sundowner every evening, but Anson did not see his wife again until Sunday morning. He was up early, shaving before going off for a round of golf. The day began badly. He awakened with a slight hangover and the disturbing echo of a dream he couldn't quite bring back into focus. Something to do with a film he had seen a year or two previously. The dream gradually became clearer as he recalled the film, a stark, almost documentary story about France just after the liberation. It was about a young Frenchman in the Marquis whose fiancée was accused of collaborating with the Germans. Her only crime was to help a dispatch rider who had fallen off his motorbike outside her home and broken his leg, but she was dragged off to the square of the little town, where her hair was shaved off in public. Then the excited crowd chased her through the streets until they trapped her in a cul-de-sac and tore her clothes off. She was left crouching against a brick wall, too shocked even to cry. The girl had committed suicide and the youth retreated into the country. After sleeping under a hedge, he set off the following morning to walk down a country lane. It was spring. The cherry orchards were in blossom and swallows swished and lunged between them, plucking insects from the air and performing little miracles of aerobatics. Crickets rubbed their legs together vigorously in the hedgerows. A frog croaked in the dew pond to his right, and as he passed

the gate leading into the field, two or three cows gazed at him with curiously understanding looks. The contrast between the bustle and beauty of life about him and his own despair made him drop his head as he walked down the lane; and when he looked up again the country had undergone a curious transformation. The flowering hedges had turned brown; changed to shrivelled lines of unproductive weeds. The trees were all stunted and the grass grew now only in desolate little clumps, surrounded by bare, dusty patches. The song of the birds and insects died down abruptly as the sun vanished behind a high grey overcast. Even as he blinked his eyes in surprise, the last of the vegetation disappeared and he found himself standing on a flat, bare, utterly shadowless plain where nothing moved and there were no sounds. He gazed about him in terror for a few seconds, then turned back. But there was nothing behind him now, either. He was alone, and the camera slowly retreated until he was left, a barely distinguishable dot on the vast empty plain. The dream had ended like that too, except that Anson was walking along the sixth fairway when it happened; and he could still hear voices, talking in Fanti.

He dipped his finger in the shaving mug, found the water was cold and shouted angrily for Amadou to bring him some more. Amadou came padding into the room with a kettle in his hand, threw the cold water out into the garden and filled the mug again. Anson had just finished lathering his face when there was a tap on the door and George walked in. He studied him for a moment in the cheap shaving mirror as George stood framed in the door, an infuriatingly complacent expression on his face, then turned round.

"Morning sir. Sit down for a couple of minutes--nearly finished. I'll get the boy to bring you a cup of tea."

"No thanks. I've just finished breakfast. Actually, I, er—I looked in to see if you would mind taking my wife round the course with you this morning?" He said wife with conscious emphasis: an unfamiliar, satisfying word. "Don't know what her game's like, but I'd be grateful if you would just sort of show her the course."

Anson turned back to the washstand and rinsed his razor in the white enamel basin. He had a perverse inclination to refuse, but knew he wasn't going to. He had already made up his mind to ask her if she played tennis or golf the next time he saw her. "Delighted," he replied politely. "Be round to pick her up in half an hour."

"Splendid," said George, without moving. He was waiting, perhaps, for some sign of admiration and approval; but Anson concentrated resentfully on the



difficult patch around a small scar on his chin, and he moved off down the steps. Anson waited for a moment, then went across the room to lean on the doorpost as George strode jauntily down the path, his hand brushing a shrub and skittering bright little jewels of water into the early morning sunshine. A sudden, childish rage seized Anson. Damn him, he thought--bloody old fool! and turned to finish his shave.

Amadou came in and put a clean pair of shorts on the bed. He went to the chest-of-drawers, took out Anson's white towel shirt and a pair of socks and put them beside the shorts. He wasn't exactly smiling, but there was a sly gleam of amusement in his eyes and Anson looked at him thoughtfully as he dried his face.

"What the hell are you grinning about?" he demanded.

"Massa?"

"Why you go laugh?"

"No be so, massa. I no fit laugh."

"I suppose you've been listening at the door and you're all set to go down to the compound and spread rumours of adultery and fornication as soon as you can get there."

"Me no savvy, massa." Amadou's air of innocence was so phoney that Anson chuckled in spite of himself.

"Go on, bugger off, you grubby little voyeur," he said, picking up his shirt.

"What time you go come for chop?"

"About two o'clock. What've we got today--curry or groundnut?"

"Curry massa."

"Hm, tell the cook I might bring Massa Pemberton and his missus for lunch."

"Yo massa. Him savvy."

"What do you mean, him savvy? I didn't know it myself until I said it."

"Plenty curry, massa. No be palaver."

Walking down the road to George's bungalow half an hour later, Anson wished he had had less to drink the previous night--or more, perhaps. A good hangover would have been preferable to the suspicion of a headache and the slight queasiness he felt now. The sun was still low on the horizon, glancing off the flat surfaces of the damp leaves and shimmering in the coarse grass. He screwed up his eyes and kicked an angular stone in the red dust; kicked again as he caught up with it and missed and walked on. He was trying to recall

what George had told him about the ore reserves the other day. Things looked bad, but the details kept slipping away from him as he visualized Daphne Pemberton walking across the lounge of the recreation club. He turned off the road and walked down the steps into George's garden. She was bending over a flower bed, cutting flowers, and she straightened up as he walked over to her.

"I hope I haven't disrupted some long-standing male foursome," she said, her scissors stabbing the sky as she brushed a stray wisp of hair off her forehead with the back of her hand.

"Well, yes--but who cares? Have you got any clubs?"

"Oh yes, George sent them down--some poor little mite who was half the size of the bag. I'll put these flowers in a vase and we can go...unless you'd like a cup of tea first?"

He said no and watched her walk up the steps to her bungalow, the pale green linen skirt drawn tight across her legs as she took each step, then turned to look down onto the native compound. The squat, mud-walled huts with their corrugated iron roofs were softened by a motionless veil of thin blue smoke. A dog barked in the distance--a meagre, lonely sound, and he felt a little knot of unhappiness in his stomach as he lit a cigarette.

## CHAPTER 10

"There's a concrete wall at the end of the drive—usual thing, with a steel plate on it. I've had the plate off and it didn't look too healthy on the other side. But back here, about a hundred feet before you reach the wall, there's a cross-cut leading to an old raise which should get you to the 2500 level...and there's a ladderway near the end of it, coming out just where we want to look. It's worth a try, I think. But whatever you do, don't go sticking your neck out too far. The whole area's thoroughly unstable."

Anson nodded as he stood beside George, studying the survey plan. He had, of course, been forced to enter old workings from time to time—but this was particularly dicey stuff. It had already caved in once, killing a number of people, and now George was calmly demanding that he should do the impossible—go into it without sticking his neck out. He leaned down over the plan again.

"This is the ventilation shaft we looked at that morning, isn't it—the one down on the side of the hill?"

"That's right."

"Why don't we have a go from that side?"

"We may have to, eventually. But that means rigging some sort of a headgear to lower people down the shaft. We only want to check the reef for the moment, and it'll be a lot easier if we can get in from this side. Just have a look—don't push it."

"O.K." Anson studied the plans for a moment or two longer, then left the office and walked up the road to the shaft. He was trying to convince himself that George lacked the courage to go into the old workings and had palmed the job off on him. One part of his mind rejected the idea, but since it suited the sense of resentment which had been building up in him during the past few weeks, he almost succeeded in persuading himself that it was true by the time he climbed into the skip to go underground. Inevitably, he began to weave a daydream. He saw himself moving confidently along the dangerous drive, ducking under shattered timber and stepping fearlessly under masses of rock

which threatened to crash down on him at any moment. He would discover an almost implausibly rich vein of ore. Daphne would hear about it, of course, and.... Anson shook his head and burst out laughing as he walked down the main haulage. Before long he would be visualizing himself on a snow-white charger, galloping towards a Daphne who was bound to an old oak tree in the heart of the forest.

The cross-cut, when he reached it, looked reassuringly solid. He and Tosa shone their lamps up the raise. It was a steep one, angling up almost vertically to the next level. The steel-runged ladder was still in place on the footwall. Anson bounced up and down on the bottom rung. It was obviously safe, but he decided he wanted to go and look through the wall at the end of the drive before he went up the raise. He still had a hankering to go where George had refused to go—a hankering which vanished abruptly when he leaned through the aperture with his lamp after Tosa had removed the steel plate. It was a mess; and the knowledge that there were bodies in there somewhere, or at any rate, skeletons, made it even more forbidding.

"Give me a drink and put it back," he grunted.

Tosa handed him his bottle of cold tea, then leaned through to look for himself.

"Why we go come for here?" he inquired, withdrawing his head and turning to Anson.

"Plenty gold live for that place."

"We no lookum?"

"No fit. Timber go for sick."

Tosa shrugged. "We no savvy if we no look."

"I savvy all right. You fit to go in there?"

"Yo, massa. I fit to go."

Anson looked at him thoughtfully. Tosa wasn't only willing, he was eager to go. He was like a small boy with an exciting cave to explore. Anson moved back to the wall to have another look. What Tosa said was perfectly true, he reflected. Nobody could possibly tell how much danger was involved—it was simply a matter of deciding if you were going to risk it. But there was no point in risking it if the level above them was in good condition.

"No, put it back. We go for topside. Look...." Anson squatted down and began to draw a sketch with his finger in the dirt, explaining to Tosa the two possible routes to the end of the drive. "You savvy?" he demanded.

Tosa looked up with a grin. "Me savvy proper. No be palaver. You go

for topside, me go for here. One no fit, number two catchem."

Anson chewed his lip for a moment. There was something appealing about Tosa's enthusiasm and he felt an odd sort of affection for him. "All right," he agreed. "We'll both have a bash. But you go softly-softly, eh? No be fit, you come back one time and wait for me here, savvy?"

"Yo, massa." Tosa promptly hung up the chop bag and disappeared through the opening in the wall. Anson watched him for a moment as he sloshed away through the water, then turned to walk back to the cross-cut, feeling more excited now than apprehensive. If they did manage to get through and find some good ore it would be a nice little feather in his cap. He had no difficulty getting up the raise, and the drive above it appeared to be in far better condition than the one Tosa had gone down. He set off along it confidently, only to discover that the six by six cribbing had begun to give way less than three hundred feet from the raise. He ducked under the sagging timbers for another twenty or thirty feet, then stopped. The drive ended in a wall of rock and splintered wood. As he stood looking at it he heard the faint whispering rush of loose ground moving somewhere. The sound was so familiar in working areas of the mine that it was a moment or two before he realized the significance of it. He turned and hurried back along the drive, almost running before he regained the raise. He was so short of breath by the time he reached the concrete wall through which Tosa had gone that his shout sounded disconcertingly feeble. There was no answer, and Anson paused to wipe the sweat off his face.

He struggled for a moment or two with the temptation to stay where he was and wait for Tosa to return. It wouldn't do, of course, because something had moved and he would have to go and look. But just as he was about to climb through the hole, his lamp flickered. Anson shook it angrily and held it up to look at the flame. It was curving towards him, and in the same instant he became aware of a soft breeze on his cheeks and an ominous rumble which abruptly grew louder as the wind increased. It happened so quickly he found himself sprinting back down the drive without any conscious thought. He dived into the cross-cut and threw himself down on the ground by the sidewall. As if his body hitting the ground had been a switch, both the noise and the wind ceased as abruptly as they had begun. He lay perfectly still for a little while, listening, then sat up and looked at the lamp. The flame was rock-steady and all he could hear now, over the thumping of his heart, was the faint gurgle of water trickling down the raise at the far end of the cross-cut.

He wiped a small deluge of sweat off his face and forced himself to stand up. His legs were shaking as he walked back to the wall, and he kept uttering childish little prayers that Tosa would suddenly appear, unharmed. When he reached it, nothing seemed to have changed. He climbed through the hole and set off, getting much further this time. In fact, he was just beginning to feel certain that Tosa's light would appear along the drive at any moment when he came to the slide. Years of dust and rock chips had mixed with water and turned into mud in the stope above. Now an ore chute had suddenly burst, releasing the mud in a long, slow slide which blocked the drive and was still moving towards him in little slithering rushes. Anson looked at it in dismay. He couldn't possibly get over it. It would take days to dig through it, and there was no knowing how much more would come down if you did. He shouted for Tosa, a sound as futile as a cry of pain in a padded cell, then picked up a rock and beat frantically on the cast-iron pipes which disappeared into the slide. There was no answering tap.

When Anson reached the shaft, twenty minutes later, he had to climb into an empty ore skip because the passenger skip had been unhooked for repairs. He arrived at the surface, dripping with sweat and covered in mud. Bursting into George's office, he experienced an inexplicable spasm of rage at George's immaculate khaki shirt and shorts--and at the calm look of interrogation on his face.

"My chop boy's been trapped by a mud slide," he said, unable to control a humiliating quiver in his voice.

"Where?"

"At the end of the 3000, somewhere."

"You managed to get through from the next level, then?"

"No, We decided to split up. He went through the wall on the 3000 and I went up the raise to the next level. I was stopped by a cave-in about 300 feet along the 2500, and by the time I got back down again one of the ore chutes from the 6/30 stope had let go."

"How big's the slide?"

"It'll take days to dig through it--and we'll have to do some timbering before we can put a crew in there."

"What on earth induced you to separate? In a case like this you should obviously have stuck together."

"If we had, we'd both be trapped down there now."

George put down his pencil and fingered his moustache for a moment.

"Yes, I daresay. But this is going to be a little awkward. I know it's not true, of course, but the natives are bound to suggest that you funk'd it and let your boy go in."

Anson blinked unhappily. It would be useless to try to explain to George the quick sense of cameraderie he had experienced when Tosa suggested that they split up. "Look, let's for Christ's sake get him out first, and then worry about what people are going to think."

George looked down. "Quite right," he agreed. "But from what you say, I take it you don't think we can get to him from where you were just now?"

"Not for several days, anyway."

George turned to the door. "Amanquah," he called, raising his voice only slightly. Amanquah came through the door immediately. The barely suppressed look of triumph on his face made it perfectly clear that he had heard every word they had said.

"Is Mr. Hampton underground this morning?" George asked him.

"No sah. He is in office."

"Ask him to come and see me, please. And bring the survey plans we were looking at this morning."

John Hampton, the Mine Captain, was a big, amiable Cornishman. He nodded to them comfortably as he walked into the office.

"Morning, George. What can I do for you?"

"Spot of bother down on the 3000 east, I'm afraid. Payne's chop boy has been trapped by a mud slide."

"3000 east! What the hell was he doing down there?"

"Oh, we're just having a look see. Might be a nice block of ore down there if we can get to it."

Hampton looked at Anson. "What happened? The slide come down between you? You look as if you only just made it."

Anson glanced down at his clothes impatiently. "No, I had to come up in an ore skip. I was on the level above when it happened."

"Pretty chancy, wandering about by yourselves, wasn't it? That area hasn't been touched for more than twenty years."

"Yes, it's unfortunate," said George dryly. "Payne tried to get through on the 2500 but the hanging wall had let go just along it, and by the time he got back down the slide had occurred."

Hampton looked puzzled, but he shrugged and stepped behind the desk to look over George's shoulder at the plans while George explained the situation

to him.

"Hmm," he grunted, when George finished. "Don't look too good. I'd better get timbering crews in there right away--then start digging fast. Was the mud right up to the hanging wall?" he asked, looking up at Anson.

"Not quite, but it might be by now. It was still moving when I left."

"I think we'd stand a better chance of getting to him from the other side," George suggested. "There's an old ventilation shaft here--with a cross-cut leading to the 2500. And if the ladderway's still good, we can go on down. We'll need a fair sized timber crew to rig a tripod and some sort of a rope hoist...."

"But that's going to mean about 3000 feet of rope to reach it," Anson objected.

"No, no. The ventilation shaft's right down near the bottom of the hill. The collar's at about the 2300 foot level."

"Oh yes, of course." Anson flushed at his stupidity and turned to Hampton. "How long's it going to take?"

"Dunno. I'll get cracking on it right away. Should be able to rig something up before it gets dark. I'll have the electricians run an extension down the hill, just in case." He looked at Anson and smiled reassuringly. "Don't worry, lad. We'll have him out if he's still alive."

Anson stood staring at the door after he left. For some reason, it had never occurred to him that Tosa might not be alive. He turned to George with a sigh.

"Sorry. I'm afraid I've really fucked things up this time."

George's expression was politely remote. "No point in discussing that now. You'd better go and get cleaned up. We'll pop down and see how they're getting on after lunch. Take my car."

Anson thanked him mechanically. As he walked down the steps to the parking lot at the back of the building, he glanced over his shoulder and saw several inquisitive faces peering at him out of windows. The news would spread like a flash, and the simple fact that he had come up and his chop boy hadn't would be enough to condemn him. He recalled the unmistakable gleam of triumph in Amanquah's eyes, and realized in a sudden fury that Charles Liddell would look at him with just the same expression of smug satisfaction. Had there really been an element of cowardice involved, he wondered uneasily--something to do with being able to turn back without being judged by Tosa if he didn't like the look of things?



The battery on George's car was flat as usual. When the engine finally caught, he revved it viciously, leaving behind clouds of blue smoke as he turned onto the road. He parked by the footpath at the bottom of the hill and walked up it to the ventilation shaft. It looked hopelessly derelict and he found it almost impossible to believe that Tosa might be only a few hundred feet away from where he was standing. He forced his way through the bushes, circling the shaft until he reached the other side, then leaned over as far as he dared, trying to look down it. There was nothing to be seen but the glistening wetness of rock which vanished into the gloom about fifty feet below him. He made his way back to the path and sat on a tree stump, waiting impatiently for the timber crew to arrive.

Nearly an hour passed before he heard a lorry grinding down the hill, and by that time some twenty Africans had joined Anson. They squatted in groups along the path, chattering gaily as they waited for the show to start. They studied Anson with unconcealed interest and what seemed to him a good deal of contempt. John Hampton came up the path, followed by two gangs of Africans carrying twenty foot poles on their shoulders. Anson fell in beside Hampton as they walked up to the shaft. "Look," he said urgently, "we don't need any damn tripod nonsense to get down there. All you need to do is rig a pulley to one of those trees and you can lower me down the side of the shaft. I can walk down there--sort of rappel my way down until I get to the cross-cut."

John Hampton took off his hard hat and scratched his head leisurely. "Yes, perhaps you're right. I didn't realize it was such a large shaft. They must have been pretty optimistic about this end of the mine once." He turned to his boss boy and took the survey plan he was holding in his hand. "Let's see now," he said, unfolding it. "The cross-cut should be on the left, there, shouldn't it?" He looked at the stunted trees to their left. "That thorn tree looks tolerably secure. O.K., let's give it a whirl."

He turned to the boss boy and began to give him instructions just as Amanquah came down the hill and walked up to Anson. "Massa Pemberton want car one time," he said officiously.

Anson looked at his watch and discovered that it was well after twelve. He turned and hurried down the path to the car without replying. To his surprise he found George dressed in his work clothes and waiting for him on the steps when he reached the office. George glanced at Anson's dirty clothes with a faint frown as he climbed in beside him and slammed the door. "I suppose

you haven't bothered with lunch, either?" he murmured disapprovingly.

"Yes, I had a sandwich," Anson lied. "The thing is, we're just about ready to go down. John's fixing up a pulley to one of the trees, and they can lower me down from that...."

George turned to look at him as they drove down the hill. "What makes you think you're going first?" he asked quietly.

"Well, of course I am. Obviously, it's my...."

"I'll be going down first. If I can get into the cross-cut—and I find it's safe—then you can join me and we'll go in together."

"But...."

"Please don't let's have any childish arguments. Your chop boy—it's Tosa, isn't it—he's in my department and he's my responsibility."

Anson swung the old Morris savagely round the last corner at the bottom of the hill and pulled up behind the lorry in a cloud of dust. Of all times.... George was going to play the C.O., giving one of his subalterns a lesson in responsibility. He was the last person in the world to cope with something like this—stiff and lacking any of Anson's coordination and agility. They walked up the footpath, Anson hurrying ahead and George following at a more dignified pace. The crowd had nearly doubled, even in the short time it took Anson to drive up to the office and back. The shaft was surrounded now by Africans, many of whom had climbed trees for a better view. There was a sudden buzz of comment as Anson and George appeared, together with some shouts that were clearly derisive if not actually hostile. The pulley was secured to two trees, with a three-hundred foot length of half-inch manilla rope threaded through it. Hampton was hanging on to it as he leaned over the edge of the shaft to look down.

They pushed their way through the Africans. "How does it look?" George asked.

"Good. I think it'll work all right. Trouble is, I can't see far enough down to make out if there's anything left of the platform at the cross-cut. If that's gone, you might have trouble swinging yourself into the footwall."

"Soon find out." George lit the lamp he was carrying in his hand and clipped it into his hard hat. "You're the expert at knots. How are you going to tie me up for this?"

"A boson's chair, of course—if I can remember how to do one. You didn't know I was a sailor once, did you?" he said with a grin, turning to Anson.

Anson shook his head angrily, unable to conceal his resentment at the

promptness with which Hampton accepted the fact that George would be the first to go down. "No, but I just hope it isn't going to take too long."

"Softly-softly catchee chop boy," he replied, still grinning as he made two loops with the end of the rope and began an intricate knot in the middle of them. "No, that not it—ah-hah, that's more like." He finished tying the knot and held the loops out to George. "Here you are, step into them." George did so, sliding the two loops up to his buttocks. "That's her," said Hampton complacently.

"Right you are. And if you can't hear me when I get down there, I'll either wave my lamp in circles if I can't get off the rope, or give it a couple of good hard yanks if I can. Then you can send Payne down." George looked around. "You'd better get this mob cleared well back up the path... and make sure you put some reliable boys on the rope."

Another five minutes passed before the grumbling Africans had been pushed back and the timber crew lined up on the rope. Hampton stood beside them as George lay down on his stomach and swung his legs over the edge of the shaft. He found a foothold almost at once and leaned back to look down, both hands gripping the rope. "O.K.," he nodded, and began to move slowly down the wall of the shaft as Hampton signalled the crew to lower the rope. Anson watched him until he disappeared into the gloom and only the light was visible, then turned to watch the crew on the rope. Every now and then the rope would jerk suddenly, as if George had slipped; then it would begin to move again, steadily. It seemed like an hour before it finally stopped moving altogether, and Hampton bellowed at the crowd for silence. They obeyed reluctantly and he cupped his hands. "How're you doing, George?" he shouted at the top of his voice.

"Fine." George's voice was surprisingly easy to hear. "Pull her up. I'm in the cross-cut. The platform's in pretty good shape."

When Anson lowered himself over the edge of the shaft a few minutes later, he found it much harder than it had seemed for George to find a foothold. His boots kept slipping, leaving him dangling awkwardly on the rope. At last he managed to dig his toes into a crevice and steady himself.

"All set?" Hampton looked at him with an odd expression, and Anson nodded impatiently.

"You don't think you'll be needing a light down there, eh?" Hampton burst out laughing and put a hand on top of Anson's head while he clipped a lamp into his hat. "Good luck," he said, still chuckling. "If you're not back

at the shaft in an hour, we'll come looking for you."

He turned to signal the boys on the rope and Anson found the descent far more trieky than he had anticipated. He kept slipping every few feet and banging his knees and elbows painfully on the wall. He was more than half way down before he began to get the hang of it, and he was annoyed to find himself panting when his feet finally landed on the platform and George took him by the elbow and pulled him into the cross-cut. He slipped out of the loops while George shouted up the shaft to tell Hampton they were all right, then shone his lamp along the cross-cut. The timber was damp and covered with fungus, but it was still square and showed no signs of sagging. George took the rope from his hand, hooked one loop over a moil in the side-wall and they set off.

When they reached the junction of the cross-cut and the main drive, they had a long struggle to get the door open. It had been a swing door originally—a sort of valve which allowed air to flow into the drive but not out again. The door was nailed up with six inch spikes, and they got it open finally by using a discarded drill steel they found lying in the dirt as a crow bar. George unhooked his lamp from his hat and shone it round with his hand as they stepped into the drive.

"Hold the door open a minute," he said, raising his lamp to look at the flame as Anson did so. He grunted with satisfaction. "Not a breath of air."

"You're telling me," said Anson, taking off his hat and running his hand down his face. It was almost unbearably hot in the drive.

"Yes, but that's encouraging. It means these stopes have caved in completely and stabilized things. So, if the ore's any good, we won't have any trouble working from this end. Well, we'll worry about that later. The ladderway should be down here on the left somewhere."

The double doors leading to the ladderway were soft and mushy, almost rotted through, but still on their hinges. Unfortunately, the ladderway itself had collapsed. It was a steep one, nearly fifty degrees, and Anson looked down it in dismay.

"Mmm, should have thought of that," George grunted. "A rope would help. But if we hang on to the pipes we may be able to manage."

"You stay here. I can get down there all right."

George looked up with a gleam of amusement in his eye. "You think I'm too damned old, don't you?" He clipped his lamp back into his hat and tested

the pipes. "Just make sure you don't fall on top of me."

Anson stood on the platform at the top of the ladderway watching him climb down it, surprised at how easily and confidently he moved. There was no sign of any ungainliness. In fact, when Anson started down after him, he found himself panting once again as he tried to keep up. He slipped once, shooting down about five feet before he fetched up against a rotten timber on the footwall. George's light swung up to him. "You all right?" he inquired.

"Yes, thanks," Anson replied irritably. He had skinned his arm just above the elbow, and he had to pause to flex his ankle, terrified for a moment that he had really sprained it. He moved more cautiously the rest of the way down the raise, and George was leaning against the door waiting for him when he reached the bottom.

"Well, here we are," said George. "If he's still alive, he can't be more than three or four hundred feet from us. And he's been here."

"What?"

George swung his head down so that the lamp shone on the ground. "Those footprints aren't twenty years old."

Anson gazed at them dumbly for a moment, then pushed through the doors into the drive and shouted Tosa's name. His reply came so promptly that Anson jumped. Tosa was shouting in Fanti and Anson began to run down the drive towards his voice. A moment or two later he saw him, just rising to his feet, holding up his hand to shade his eyes from the light.

He was so excited that it was a long time before they could make any sense of what he was saying. But gradually it began to dawn on Anson that Tosa was excited, not so much because he had been rescued, as because he, Anson, was still alive. Apparently Tosa had reached the end of the drive without any trouble, then gone to the bottom of the ladderway to wait for Anson. While he was waiting he heard the first movement of ground. He was frightened, but decided to wait a little longer; then when he had given up and was walking back down the drive, the slide began. His lamp was blown out by the first rush of air and when he, like Anson, turned to run, he tripped and fell headlong between the rails, losing his lamp in the process. He spent the next two hours crawling about on his hands and knees, hunting for it before he finally gave up and squatted down to wait for help. There was a big welt on the side of his head where he had banged it on a rail when he fell, but otherwise he was unharmed.

Anson clapped him on the shoulder, touched by the obvious pleasure in his face that Anson was safe. "No palaver," he grinned. "Let's get the hell out of here."

George walked slowly along the drive ahead of them, examining the reef in the hanging wall. Every now and then he stopped to pry a piece loose with his fingers and put it in his pocket. He went past the ladderway they had come down, to the end of the drive, and paused for some time, pulling several chunks off the face and looking at them intently.

"What do you think of this?" he asked, handing one to Anson.

Anson bent over it. He wiped it with his thumb and looked again. There were little filaments of gold clearly visible around the matrix of the quartz pebbles. "Blimey! This is as good as anything I've seen from Obuassi."

"Better, I think. We'll have to try and get a sample crew down here tomorrow."

When they got back to the shaft they could hear the hum of what sounded like hundreds of voices on the surface. Anson glanced at his watch. The morning shift would be out by now and most of them had probably come down to watch. He couldn't make himself understood when he shouted up to Hampton, so they put Tosa in the rope and Anson stepped out cautiously onto the platform with him to signal with his lamp. The noise above died down a little and Tosa was lifted off his feet. A great cheer rang out five minutes later when he reached the surface, and even bigger ones greeted first Anson, then George, as they emerged. They were surrounded by Africans patting them on the back and trying to shake their hands. George took his lamp off his hat, blew it out and pushed his way through them to walk back to the car, acknowledging their enthusiasm with a tolerant smile.

"Well, we were lucky," he remarked, as he let out the clutch. "But I hope you learned your lesson. Never let it even seem as though you're sending a native where you wouldn't go yourself."

"Why not?" Anson demanded resentfully. "They've got to learn to stand on their own feet sometime."

George shrugged. "You don't really believe that, do you?"

## CHAPTER 11

Although for a little while Anson's misfortune seemed to promise a new lease of life for the mine--samples taken in the drive where Tosa had been trapped produced dazzling results--the discovery came at an ironically inopportune moment. The African Mineworker's Union had very nearly achieved sufficient unanimity to bring off a strike. They were demanding formidable increases, both of salary and responsibility, and the company, which was preparing to argue against the salary increases on the grounds that the mine was a marginal operation, promptly concealed the new discovery and refused to sanction any development of it until the strike had been either averted or settled. Anson was warned to say nothing about the assay results and to make a point of emphasizing to his African staff the steady deterioration of ore reserves.

When George finished explaining this to him, he burst out laughing. "That's rich. For twenty years we've been sitting right on top of a little bonanza of ore--and now we're not going to touch it because the Africans might benefit from it. Don't you think it's a classic example of cutting off our noses to spite our faces?"

"Things are seldom as simple as young people would like them to be," said George, with a touch of asperity he rarely displayed towards Anson. "It's going to cost a lot of money to bring this new ore into production. And if we start paying Africans twice what they're getting now...."

"I don't see it. The Africans should be getting more--much more. After all, it's their gold. And as for pulling this ore out, the shaft's there already. All we need is a headgear and a short ropeway to the mill, and we could be in production in a couple of months."

"That's all," George agreed, smiling. "And you'd go right ahead on the strength of a few samples in a development drive, wouldn't you. No need to do any diamond drilling to satisfy ourselves that it isn't just a small pocket? Well, anyway, the decision doesn't rest with us, so let's not worry about it too much." He glanced at his watch. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got to go to a meeting down in the village with Arthur and Bert Cooper--

negotiations with union representatives."

"But—but I'm not very happy about this. It seems to me I'm being asked to tell lies."

"Lies?" George looked up at him sharply. "Aren't you exaggerating a little? All I'm suggesting is that you play down these assay results until we've had a chance to find out if they're going to lead to anything more than a small, isolated pocket of ore. Remember, we're not dealing with mature and responsible people. If the Union gets hold of those results.... The thing is, there are certain fundamentals about running any business, and the most fundamental one of all is that if you pay employees so much money that you don't make a profit, the business has to close down. I admire your idealism, but if this mine does have to close down, it's hard to see how that would benefit the Africans very much."

"Yes. Yes, you're right, of course. I'm sorry."

George smiled pleasantly. "My grandfather always used to say, 'don't be sorry--be careful!'" He stood up. "Oh, incidentally, while I remember it, my wife wanted me to ask if you'd play golf with her on Sunday? Something to do with helping her to cure her slice--whatever that is."

Sitting on the verandah of his bungalow with a cup of tea half an hour later, Anson tried to make up his mind if he really did agree with George. It was the same old argument, of course: 'we're doing it for their own good.' He stirred his tea and shrugged, unable for very long to keep his mind off his personal problems. He had reached a point where a decision was called for. In another three months his tour would be over. If he was going to resign at the end of it, he should have let the company know by now so that they could find a replacement for him. But he hadn't, because in the last few weeks he had fallen in love with Daphne Pemberton--stupidly, ridiculously in love. He spent half the time despising himself; the rest of it feeling deliciously happy. Commonsense warned that he was well on the way to making a damn fool of himself. He was allowing himself to become the stock character of a Woodhouse comedy: an infatuated youth, hanging around another man's wife. But commonsense faded to an inconsequential whisper whenever he saw her. And he saw a great deal of her because he was always invited to sit at their table if they were in the club; and now he and Daphne played tennis and golf together almost constantly.

If only George would exhibit some signs of disapproval, it might help him to break off a relationship which, even if harmless, was inevitably causing a good deal of gossip. But George had become increasingly preoccupied with the



African problem. He was constantly attending meetings--meetings with the G.M.; meetings with Vickers, the District Officer; and once even a conference with the Governor and his staff in Accra. As a consequence, he appeared to welcome Anson's readiness to entertain his wife while he was busy, and it never occurred to him, apparently, that there was any danger they might grow too fond of one another. He smiled indulgently at the occasional catty remarks to this effect which were made in his presence. Perhaps it was arrogance--the thought that no woman would ever contemplate being unfaithful to him. But Anson had an uncomfortable suspicion that George trusted him so implicitly that he could afford to smile at the insinuations of lesser beings..

And, of course, Anson had no real proof that Daphne was fond of him. She had turned out to be a far cry from the cool, faintly austere creature he imagined her when he first saw her. On the contrary, she was vivacious and totally unpredictable: sometimes elusive and withdrawn; at others capable of unexpected and often disconcerting revelations about herself. Anson learned, by fits and starts as it were, that she was brought up in a dull and gloomy country vicarage, watched over by parents with zealous middle-class anxiety because she inconsiderately allowed herself to grow up into a remarkably attractive young woman. When the war came along, she managed to escape into the Wrens. Within months she was engaged to a Lieutenant-Commander in the V.R.'s. But before they had a chance to get married his destroyer was blown out of the blue waters of the Mediterranean by a mine just as it was about to slip into the harbour at Valetta. She was forced to return to the vicarage when the war ended, and although she had never said so, it was impossible to avoid the conclusion that she had married George to escape from it for the second time. Now she was revelling in her freedom. She made no attempt to conceal the pleasure she derived from being the undisputed centre of attraction at any gathering. She was danced off her feet whenever there was music. She was frowned at and disapproved of by every other wife on the mine, and she loved every minute of it. But although Anson obviously shared more of her confidence than anyone else, she did, on frequent occasions, seem to treat him as a convenience. Often, she would dance with somebody else, then go and sit at their table and ignore him for most of the evening, returning to mock him with her slightly monkeyish face--which was so lovely it made his heart ache--when he was inclined to be sulky.

Anson sighed and shouted for Amadou to bring him another cup of tea. He had only been love, really in love, once before. He was seventeen then

and his love was totally devoid of any physical desire. He never even kissed the girl, yet his life seemed to revolve around her for more than a year—and of course, he managed to forget her remarkably quickly in the excitement of joining the Air Force and learning to fly. Now it was different. He wanted Daphne; wanted her tall, slim body with a helpless mixture of devotion and physical urgency. If only he had taken more advantage of his opportunities during the war, he reflected sadly, he would at least have known where he stood with her. But during the war girls hadn't interested him very much, perhaps because they were always so readily available. He had experienced three or four rather unsatisfactory consummations, but never the sort of driving emotional and physical attachment which consumed him now, so that he never learned very much about how they thought or behaved in any given situation. As a result, he felt horribly guilty about George, and tortured by Daphne's elusiveness. George trusted him as a gentleman, and Daphne treated him like a very reliable friend.

The problem had become acute for Anson the previous Saturday. It began with the cricket match against Bondaye. They were far and away the best mine team on the Coast, with several players of Anson's age and ability. But Anson enjoyed his most successful day since he arrived. In the morning his outswinger curved more deceptively than ever before and he took five wickets. In the afternoon Daphne made George bring her down to watch while Anson made the stand that brought victory. He scored sixty-four runs in just over two hours, coming in undefeated at the end of the game, secure for once in the secret look of pride Daphne bestowed on him as he acknowledged the applause. His pleasure was so infectious that everyone else responded when they sat in the club afterwards, drinking shandy and accusing each other of unmerited luck and of bribing the umpires. Derek Underwood, the opposing captain, and Brian Matthews, who were to be Anson's guests for dinner, were friends of his from previous matches and they settled down to enjoy the evening. When they broke up to bathe and eat before the inevitable Saturday night dance, George offered to drop them off at Anson's mess and bring them back to the club after dinner. They sat crammed in the back of the Morris, singing Lloyd George Knew my Father to the tune of Onward Christian Soldiers, while George smiled indulgently as he drove down the hill.

Daphne came to the dance in an emerald green cocktail dress which fitted her like the skin of a sleek young duiker. She looked exquisitely cool and beautiful, and she was danced off her feet by young men who grew alcoholically

sentimental as the evening wore on. She was having the time of her life; such a good time that when George decided, shortly before midnight, that he would have to go to bed before he fell asleep in his chair, he accepted a lift with the Coopers, leaving the car with Anson and asking him to bring her home when she had had enough.

"Bugger me!" said Brian Matthews, turning to Anson incredulously after Daphne had gone to dance again. "Does he often do this? I mean, leave a smashing bit of stuff like that with you for the rest of the evening?"

"Occasionally," Anson replied smugly.

"He's bonkers. You getting any?"

"Don't be smutty. This is not Bondage. We know how to conduct ourselves here."

"You're a pompous closet," said Brian. "And by God, I wish I could change places with you."

At one o'clock, when the dance was in full swing, somebody suggested they should go for a swim. It was not an unusual suggestion: they often went and threw themselves into the luke warm swimming pool to cool off in the middle of the evening; and now, since they'd all had enough to drink, they entertained tantalizing visions of Daphne jumping in with them. There was a rowdy chorus of agreement. The atmosphere of youth and sensuous vitality seemed to isolate their table from the rest of the club, and Daphne flushed with pleasure as everyone turned to see how she would respond.

She bent towards Anson with a little grimace. "I can't," she protested, her head touching his as she murmured into his ear. "I've got the curse."

The clean, biscuity smell of her hair made his head swim. He looked into her eyes and felt absurdly happy, certain that this was the moment of purest intimacy he had ever experienced with a girl. "Do you want me to take you home, then?"

"Not yet. Let's go down and watch them for a little while first."

"We can't. If you don't go with them, they'll all be dashing around with nothing on."

"Goody!"

"Are you two coming, or not?" Derek demanded.

"Still working on it. You go on down anyway, and I'll see you later."

"Yeah, I bet it'll be much later, too."

Daphne stuck out the tip of her tongue at him as he walked away and Anson experienced a sensation that was becoming more and more familiar: a

combination of vivid excitement and stabbing anxiety. Was there really something doing? The thought made him dizzy.

"Let's have another drink," she suggested. "Then perhaps I'll pluck up enough courage to go and get my bathing costume. I've got a very daring two-piece one that nobody here's seen yet."

"But I thought you said...."

"Yes, I know—I was only joking. In any case, George'd have a fit."

Looking up to signal for the steward to bring another round, Anson saw that Betty Thornton and Barbara Manning were sitting with their heads together, casting quick glances of disapproval towards him as they spoke. He looked down again as he encountered Reggie's sardonic gaze, realizing all at once that this was the first time he had ever been alone with Daphne, except on the golf course. And this was very different to being on a golf course. Daphne was drinking ginger squares. She had put back at least five of them, and he wished now he'd refused to buy her another drink and insisted on taking her home.

She was sitting with her chin propped on her hand, gazing out into the warm night with a faintly dreamy and speculative look that Anson sometimes found fixed on himself when he glanced up at her unexpectedly.

"A penny?" he said quietly.

She twisted her head on her hand and looked at him quizzically. "You'd be shocked if I told you."

"Don't come the sophisticated matron on me. I don't shock easily."

Daphne chuckled. "You do, of course. That's why it's such fun to tease you."

"Try me?"

"All right. I was wondering what it would be like to do it in the water."

"Do what?" Anson looked down, angrily aware that he had flushed.

"There you are, you see. You're even blushing." Daphne stifled her laughter and sat up as the steward put their drinks on the table and Anson signed the chit. "Actually, I was wondering what it would be like," she went on, as he shuffled away, "with somebody you'd only just met. Somebody young and strong and attractive...."

"Who's that?" said Anson jealously.

"Oh, any of them. They're all nice. I think everyone should be entitled to an orgy now and then. The Africans are."

"How do you know?"

"By looking at them. They're so much happier and more relaxed than we are. They haven't lost their spontaneity."

Anson grunted. "You should come underground with me some time. All they do is snap and snarl at us all the time."

"Well, obviously. That's because they know you're trying to ruin them by turning them into grubby little clock-watchers."

"'Strewth, you're not going to come the old 'noble savage' thing, are you?"

"Hm." Daphne smiled without looking up. "There's a lot to be said for it. How were you brought up? Big family?"

"No, I only had one sister, and I didn't see much of her after I was about eight or nine. My parents separated and I went to boarding school. Spent most of my holidays with friends before the war."

"I had three brothers—all older than me. And we were always treated as if we were in deadly peril of corrupting each other. For as long as I can remember, we were rigidly separated. I think my mother was terrified we would see each other in the bath or something."

"What brought this on, all of a sudden?"

Daphne shrugged. "Oh, I don't know. Thinking of your friends being able to swim with nothing on, I suppose. Reminds me of something that happened when I was about twelve. My parents had gone to watch my brothers play rugger. We had an aunt staying with us at the time who had two sons, both a year or two older than me. The aunt was in bed with a cold and the two boys refused to go to the match because it was such a filthy day. My parents were obviously worried about it, but eventually they went off and left us. I wasn't used to being alone with boys, and to begin with I was horribly stiff and awkward. But these ones were fun and in the end we became much too pally. We made a pact. They would take down their trousers and show me, if I would take my knickers down and let them look. There were two of them, so I had to do it first. I'd just pushed my knickers down to my ankles and lifted my skirt when the aunt walked through the door to see what we were up to."

Daphne smiled and sipped her drink. "I don't know who was more horrified. And of course, all hell broke loose when my parents got back. I'm sure they seriously considered sending for the family doctor to examine me and see if anything had happened. The sad part of it was that I never even got a chance to look at the boys. And I did want to so badly, because I really didn't have

the faintest idea what a boy's—a boy's tassel was like. I had all sorts of weird...."

She broke off suddenly and grimaced. "Why am I telling you all this? You must be terribly embarrassed."

Anson shifted uncomfortably in his chair. He was more dismayed than embarrassed by her disclosures. He had a fleeting suspicion that they were deliberate; the conversation hadn't really led up to them, somehow. But more than that, he felt a surprisingly strong resentment at her for not remaining cool and inscrutable. She was becoming all too human and understandable.

"Come on, time to go home," she said abruptly, sitting up and finishing her drink. "I'll have to go and powder my nose first."

Three quarters of a moon sliced through the tops of the palm trees as they drove down the road, and the sand in the waste dump at the bottom of the valley shone like an incongruous snowfield in the warm night. Changing down as they came to the steepest part of the hill, Anson wondered what would happen if he stopped the car and tried to kiss her. Her face was in the shadows, but the moonlight, angling across the car as they turned into the valley, silhouetted her breasts for a moment in sharp relief and he felt a terrible yearning. "Daphne..." he began.

"What time are you picking me up for golf in the morning?" she asked, almost, it seemed to Anson, as though she had been waiting to interrupt him if he spoke.

"Whenever you want me to."

"Half-past eight too early?"

"No, that's fine."

They ground slowly up the hill on the other side of the valley, then turned along the side of it. Anson switched off the ignition and the lights, allowing the car to coast the last hundred yards or so to George's bungalow. Daphne had the door open before they stopped moving.

"No, don't get out," she said, walking round the front of the car to Anson's window. "Thank you for a lovely evening. I have enjoyed myself."

"Me too. If only it didn't have to end."

"It needn't, for you. Haven't you been a good host and arranged a mammy party for your guests?"

"Oh Christ!"

"Why don't you try it? It might be a wonderfully yummy experience. Everybody says they've got lovely cool skins."

"God, I'm so bloody sick...."

Daphne giggled as she stooped down to look into his face. "Has anyone ever told you how beautiful you are when you're angry?"

Before Anson could reply, she leaned through the window and kissed him; a warm, deliberate kiss, lingering just long enough for him to reach for her before she broke away. "Would you feel any better if I told you that I haven't got the curse?" she whispered. "I only said that because I was afraid I couldn't trust myself...."

"Oh Jesus--I'm so awfully in love with you," he burst out.

"I know, sweetie--and you mustn't be," she said, patting his cheek. She turned to walk quickly along the path and up the steps to the verandah, pausing for a moment to look back at him before opening the screen door and disappearing inside.

Anson trod on the starter button, forgetting to take the car out of gear. It leapt forward in an ungainly jerk. He leaned his head on the steering wheel for a moment and chuckled. Taking the car out of gear, he started it and drove straight back to the club, pretending to look around for his party in the lounge. The Mannings and the Thorntons were just leaving. Reggie he observed, was distinctly unsteady on his feet.

"Back so soon?" Barbara asked sweetly. "Still, I suppose you've got plenty of time."

Anson saw the disappointment in her eyes that he'd come back too quickly to give her any grounds for genuine suspicion. "Oh well, I've got more than you have, anyway," he replied nastily.

"That's it, stiff upper, eh, what? Don't let 'em get to you, m'boy!" The doctor punched him on the shoulder and weaved his way to the steps, chuckling delightedly to himself.

## CHAPTER 12

Reggie Thornton reached for the lint and swabbed out the ulcer, leaning down to see if it was really clean. He sprinkled sulphur into the gaping little crater with its angry white rim and taped a dressing over it with mechanical speed, remembering vaguely that he had read somewhere that the sulphur based drugs were useless in open wounds.

"When did this start?" he asked.

The big Twi lay on the treatment couch, looking up at him with uncomprehending eyes. The doctor shook his head impatiently as he saw the matchsticks on the boy's shins. He had yaws--little worms which burrowed under the skin to lay their eggs. If they weren't removed very carefully, the head broke off and festered within a matter of hours. The Africans treated them by twisting the worm's tail around a matchstick and tying it with a thread. Every few hours they would turn the match slightly until the yaw was forced to let go. But the ulcer he had just cleaned was on the boy's thigh. It had nothing to do with the yaws, and the doctor was puzzled. He pressed the bell on the wall and one of his nursing orderlies came into the surgery.

"Ask him when this started," he said, moving across to the washbasin to scrub his hands, listening with a faint irritation to the long drawn out conversation which seemed to consist for the most part of grunts.

"He say it go humbug him for two week," the orderly told him.

"Then why the hell didn't he come to see me before?"

"Him no savvy, massa. He say it go humbug him small-small."

"Hmm, well it's not small-small now. We'll have to keep him in for a few days." The doctor shook the water from his hands, took a towel off the rail and walked across to the boy. "He's got another one starting." He gestured to the angry red swelling just below the boy's groin. "Change the dressing every four hours, and get him cleaned up. Use alcohol on the yaws and I'll take them out tomorrow morning."

"Yo, massa." The orderly turned to the boy and a fierce altercation



broke out. "Now what's the matter?" Reggie demanded.

"He say he no be fit to stay. He be shop steward—go catch Union meeting tonight."

"Not tonight, he won't. Get him into bed and don't argue with him. Is there anyone else?"

"Massa Lidder go come."

"Liddell? What's he doing here at this time of day—accident?"

"No savvy, massa."

"All right, send him in. And don't forget to change those dressings every four hours. I think I'll put him on penicillin tomorrow."

The doctor walked across and sat down at his desk as the Twi pulled on his shorts, still complaining shrilly. The orderly changed the sheet on the couch before leading him out with an expression of patient superiority on his face. When Liddell walked into the room, the doctor saw that he was still in his working clothes and also that he was very nervous. Reggie smiled to himself as he made an instant diagnosis. Liddell had come now because everyone was at work and there was less likelihood of him being seen on his way to the hospital.

"Morning Charles. What appears to be the problem?"

"It's my, er—well, I seem to have caught something," he mumbled.

"Sorry to hear that. But it does happen, of course."

"Yes, but I haven't...."

The doctor held up his hand. "I remember rather vividly my first lecture on V.D. at St. Mary's. We were warned that when people get a dose they usually react in one of two ways: either they get all embarrassed and come to see you blushing and stammering about lavatory seats; or they're very brash about it. Walk into your office, slap it on the table and say, 'get this ready for Saturday night.' It's very obvious which type you belong to—and there's nothing to be gained by being embarrassed about it...."

But really, doctor—I haven't...."

"Charles, Charles...don't you know by now that only doctors and clergymen can catch a dose off a lavatory seat? The rest of you get it from plain, ordinary old fornication. Now, when did you last have intercourse, and who was it with?"

Charles Liddell looked down at the floor glumly. It was a long time before he replied. "About two weeks ago."

"Two weeks? And when did you start thinking about fish hooks when you

relieved yourself, and find that you had a discharge?"

"A day or two."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, perhaps a little longer than that."

"Like five or six days."

Liddell nodded his head sulkily. "Yes."

"Damned young fool. And I suppose you've been in a panic ever since—trying to pluck up enough courage to come and see me. If you'd come when you first noticed it I could have had you fit by now—and the girl as well, so that she wouldn't still be wandering around, giving it to somebody else. Please remember that in future. All right, let's have a look."

"It's not very serious nowadays—we can clear it up in no time at all," said the doctor a few minutes later, rubbing alcohol into his hands after he had washed them. "You'll have to come in twice a day for shots. And remember, no booze while you're on penicillin. If you're afraid people are going to laugh at you when you go into the club and order ginger ale, skip the club for a week. I mean it now—no alcohol for a week."

The doctor walked across the room to the medicine cabinet and took out a tube. "Here's some ointment. It won't help much now—but the next time you have a bang, wash yourself thoroughly afterwards and rub some of this into your knob."

"There won't be a next time."

"Possibly, but take it anyway. Now, what was her name? I want to get her fixed up as well."

Liddell shook his head. "I don't know," he admitted miserably.

"Well how did you get hold of her then? Cook...houseboy?"

"Neither. She was waiting outside the club and she followed me."

"Are you going back to your mess now?"

"Yes."

"Send your houseboy up to me right away."

"What for? He won't know."

"Don't be so bloody silly—of course he will. They know everything we do. Now, off you go. And don't look as if the world's coming to an end. Better men than you have caught a dose of clap before now. Next time, use your head. Come and see me at once—even if it only turns out to be a strain."

Reggie glanced at his watch after Liddell left, then took a bottle of whiskey and a glass out of the drawer of his desk, poured himself a weak drink

and walked across to the washbasin to fill it up with water. It was nearly time for lunch, the meal he dreaded most of all. He couldn't fortify himself with anything stronger than a watery drink in the middle of the day, and Betty would be bright and talkative, asking endless questions, grimacing when he replied with details of the more unpalatable diseases he had treated that morning and gossiping about Anson, whose attentions to George Pemberton's wife had introduced a succulent new bone for the women to chew on.

Leaning against the washbasin, he drank some of the whiskey and sighed. He had always found Liddell a singularly unpleasant youth and he would like to have been able to punish him in some way—to reveal his hypocrisy and expose him for the sanctimonious little prig he was. But drunks were obliged to forfeit the pleasures of recrimination. They were a species of moral eunuch. Besides, this was no place for strong emotions. Who was it, he wondered, who'd said that? Claimed that West Africa was no place for love or hate—it was fit only for the seedy passions of envy and spite. Idly he watched the bluebottle at the window. The sharp smell of antiseptic in the room goaded it to a tireless assault on the wire-mesh screen. Nice piece of symbolism. Graham Greene! he recalled suddenly, pleased with himself. A real drunk would never have been able to remember that. He gulped the last of the drink down, rinsed the glass out and returned it to the drawer of his desk, popping a peppermint into his mouth before he left the surgery. The sun stabbed at his eyes as he walked across to the company car, driven by an African who wore a perpetual silly grin on his face. The doctor realized it was nothing more than a nervous grimace, but the temptation to erase it with some violent gesture was almost irresistible.

Two hours later he was reprimanding another African with an identically vacant and infuriating grin on his face. He inspected the wash house at the main shaft once a week and it was always filthy. Every two or three months he would sack the boy whose task it was to keep it clean and get Henry Fuller to hire a new one. But it never made any difference. They would work for a few days, then slack off and begin to spend their time squatting in the shade, dozing, or gossiping with the watchmen, as this one had been when the doctor arrived.

"I come look tomorrow. No be fit, you go for sack--savvy?"

"Yo massa," the boy agreed enthusiastically, and the doctor sighed as he mopped his neck with his handkerchief. There was green slime on the floor where it slanted down to the drainhole in the middle. The wash house smelled of stale sweat and fungus and the sharp stinging odour of urine. He would have to have it fumigated again, he decided, screwing up his eyes against the hard

afternoon sun as he walked down the steps. He felt a little dizzy. Should have skipped that brandy after lunch, but it helped to settle his stomach after the greasy fried egg plant the cook served with the cutlets. He walked down the road in the shade of the royal palms planted when the mine first opened more than sixty years ago. In spite of the shade it was almost unbearably hot. Sweat was coursing down the side of his face and his shirt clung soggly to his back. He looked longingly at the club and wished it was later in the day. A nice cool beer was what he needed. Stretched out on a chair under the fan with a beer so cold the condensation glistened like seed pearls on the side of the glass. He turned to look across the road as he heard voices in the main office building. Perhaps George was in. He could scrounge a cup of tea and find out how the strike negotiations were progressing. George was in his office and he looked up in surprise when the doctor appeared.

"Well, well—and to what do we owe this unexpected pleasure? he inquired, gesturing to a chair.

"Mad dogs and all that. Just dropped in to cool off. I've been inspecting what you euphemistically call the wash house."

"It's your own fault, you know. You're too soft. They know you sympathise with their laziness—and they take advantage of you."

"I fire them with monotonous regularity. What else can I do?"

"George looked as if he was about to offer some advice, then shrugged.

"Like a cup of char?" he asked.

"Thanks, I would—unless you've got a cold beer stashed away somewhere?"

"'Fraid not. Besides, the sun's not down yet."

"It is in Kuala Lumpur."

Smiling briefly, George called Amanquah in to order a pot of tea. "So, what's new on the medical front?" he asked, after Amanquah left.

"Nothing. Pox and yaws. What's going on at this end? We going to have a strike or not?"

"Hope not. It's become more of a political issue than anything else. We're the test case. If the strike comes off and we make any stupid concessions, every mine on the Coast will be out in a couple of days."

"And is it going to come off?"

"Hard to say. They're demanding all sorts of fancy increases—but I don't think they're prepared to risk the sacrifice of a couple of week's pay trying to get 'em."

"But you're going to have to give them something, aren't you?"

"A little, perhaps."

Reggie smiled. "Come on, don't be so bloody cagey. Tell me about it. I'm interested."

"What do you want me to do—give you a lecture on the economics of the situation...?"

"Yes, why not? Do you think I'm a union spy, or something."

George rubbed his chin and grimaced. "All right," he said, "the problem is this: we can't possibly give them as much as they're demanding—we'd have to close down if we did. Actually, what's really needed is a basic change...we need to mechanize. Then we could afford to pay them a lot more because mechanization would cut the labour force in half. Snag is, it'll cost a hell of a lot of money to do that, and with the political situation as shaky as it is—both here and at home—I can't see London raising the capital."

"Has anyone ever tried to explain this to the Africans?"

"Yes, of course we have. And they won't hear of it. They want the best of both worlds—as many jobs as there are now, all paying as much as the Europeans are getting. But I think they'll back off in the end. They tried a strike at a bauxite mine in Nigeria a month or so ago, and it's closed down for good. The boys here know that, so it's only our friend Kwame who's trying to keep the pot boiling, from purely political motives. He's been in touch with the union executive all along. Surprised none of his bully boys have shown up yet...."

George broke off and turned to the door as someone knocked. "Come in," he called.

Arthur Hutchinson opened the door, then paused on the threshold. "Talk of the devil," he smiled, looking at the doctor.

"Thank you."

"Sorry, I didn't mean it that way. I've just been trying to phone you. Something rather awkward's cropped up. Remember that boy Wally Manning sent to you the other evening—the one who'd fallen into the settling tank at the mill?"

Reggie studied his face for a moment, dismayed at how tired and ill he looked. He remembered the boy clearly enough. Among other processes, cyanide was used in the mill to extract the gold from the ore. There were numerous large tanks containing solutions of cyanide strong enough to poison someone, and Africans slipped and fell into them at more or less regular intervals.

"Yes, what about him?" he asked.

"Apparently he died last night."

"Died? What of?"

"From the description, it sounds very like cyanide poisoning. Two boys who claim they are his father and brother have come to demand compensation. They say he complained of stomach pains, then went into convulsions and died before they could do anything about it."

"But that's bloody well impossible. I kept him in for twenty-four hours and we made sure—absolutely certain there was nothing wrong with him before we released him...pumped out his stomach, put him under the shower, gave him new clothes...."

Arthur stood with his head cocked, listening carefully. He had an odd expression on his face, Reggie thought, growing irritated. It just couldn't have been cyanide. They had syringed out his ears, cleaned his fingernails—and if he'd swallowed any when he fell into the tank, there'd have been a reaction within a few hours. "I tell you, it's impossible," the doctor repeated. "Sheer nonsense!"

Arthur glanced at George, then looked out of the window. It was difficult to fathom what he was thinking. He seemed almost embarrassed. "The thing is, Reggie, these two relatives of his have been to see the orderlies in the hospital and—well, it's no good beating around the bush...they're hinting that you were a little under the weather that evening."

The doctor flushed. "That's absurd," he protested. "I'd had a few, of course—Wally didn't phone me until about half-past seven, and I was in the club. But hang it all, I wasn't drunk. And in any case, I was utterly sober when I examined him the next evening before we let him out."

"Yes, I know. It's just that it's come at a particularly awkward time. If the union gets hold of it they're bound to try to make a big thing out of it. Normally, we pay a hundred quid on a compensation case when the boy was definitely killed at work. But these two are demanding five hundred...."

"To hell with that...they're not blackmailing me. I want a post mortem—we can analyse the stomach contents. Where's the body—in the compound morgue?"

"No, he didn't live in the compound. He was in that little village about four miles out along the Kumasi road. And they say they buried him last night."

"Hm, I bet they did...and we're going to dig him up again."

Arthur turned to George. "What do you think?" he asked. "Pay them and be done with it—or risk a fuss just as we seem to be weathering this strike

business?"

"Oh no," said George, without hesitation. "If we do pay 'em it's as good as admitting that we've been negligent and the union will be onto it in a flash."

"I suppose so. But what if it turns out that he did die of cyanide poisoning?"

"I very much doubt it," said George. "My guess is that we'll find an empty grave and that the boy's gone back to the bush."

Arthur's face was blank for a moment, then his eyes lit up. "My word, I hadn't thought of that—you're probably right." He turned to the doctor with a smile. "Come on, let's get down there right away and get an exhumation order from Vickers. Do you want to come with us?" he asked George, "or are you too busy."

"By all means." George stood up as Arthur opened the door and found Amanquah standing outside it with a tea tray in his hands. He had obviously been listening and Arthur grimaced angrily. "What the hell do you think you're doing?" he demanded.

"Bring tea, sah."

Arthur turned back to George. "How are we going to stop him warning anybody?"

"Why not take him with us and we can keep an eye on him?"

"Why not, indeed."

"No, sah. I have union businesses...."

"Put that tray down on my table," said George quietly, "and then get out to that lorry."

Reggie smiled as Amanquah put the tray down hastily and hurried through the door ahead of them. As he followed he saw the two Africans who were demanding compensation squatting on the verandah. They, too, had smiles which weren't really smiles on their faces—but they were disconcerted when Arthur sent his office boy to fetch a driver from the garage and told them to get into the lorry parked in the shade of the building. They climbed into the back, grumbling sullenly all the way down to the village.

Vickers, the District Officer, had a thin face which some people described as sensitive and others as effeminate. He looked harrassed and resentful when they were shown into his office. His district was the most potentially explosive one in the colony, and he had complained to the doctor only a day or two previously that he no longer had any real authority. "It's a hopeless cock-up," he grumbled.

"Bloody labour government want to give the whole show away, and the Colonial Office expect us to walk around with swagger sticks, tapping wogs on the head and telling them to be good. That's what they used to do before they got a cushy job in the office—but they had a bloody great gunboat to back them up." Reggie felt sorry for him. His day had passed and he was left with all the responsibility and none of the fun of being an empire builder. In fact he was an empire...what? liquidator, presumably.

The doctor sat in a hard-backed chair under a fan which did nothing but stir up little puffs of warm air in the afternoon heat, while Arthur explained the situation. He had a slight headache and he felt horribly depressed. This wasn't the time or the place for somebody like himself. One needed to be strong, ridiculously unassailable, ready without any doubts or qualifications for the absurdly fierce little confrontations which were bound to occur more and more frequently now.

"But if he was kept in the hospital for twenty-four hours, there can't be any question about it, can there?" Vickers asked.

Arthur's hesitation lasted just long enough to suggest that there was. "No—no, I'm sure there isn't."

"Well then, why don't you just refuse to pay any compensation and tell them to clear out."

"Normally I would. But in the present circumstances I'd like to sort of clear things up beyond any doubt."

"I see."

Vickers did not seem entirely satisfied and the doctor grimaced as he lit a cigarette, resisting the temptation to shout at him to get on with it. They were all enjoying themselves, he realized suddenly—relishing the drama of the situation and feeling superior...capable men, handling a circumstance which had come about because one of their number was weaker and less capable. Arthur and George weren't going to say anything, of course; instead they would congratulate themselves that they were covering up for him from purely disinterested motives. In their stupidity they looked down on him because he wouldn't join the silly little geometrical world they had tried to construct—a world about to blow up in their faces any moment. Why did it irritate him so much, though? he wondered, uncrossing his legs to ease the damp trouser leg away from his thigh where the sweat made it stick. Some residue of guilt about his drinking still lingered, obviously. He resented the implication of professional incompetence, resented, when it came down to it, the fact that he drank. Why



did he? It was just as pointless as anything else and it wasn't hereditary. Yet even in his days as a medical student he drank. In the riotous aftermath of rucker games he had begun to switch from beer to whiskey and to black out occasionally, until, one Sunday morning, he woke up in a police cell. A fifty shilling fine and a contemptuous dressing down by the magistrate were unpleasant enough, but he had also come very close to being thrown out of medical school and this quietened him down all right—at least until he qualified.

"Yes, all right," Vickers agreed, eventually, picking up the telephone. "I'll get Peter Chard to bring a couple of constables along to dig him up. Damned nuisance, happening now."

Ah yes, a nuisance, thought the doctor. That was all it was to the secure. But how long was their security going to last? He remembered how confident he was when he qualified. How secure he felt in his ability to marry at once and support Betty. No internship for him. No seedy locum. How easily he managed to persuade Betty's father to lend them enough money to buy the ridiculously expensive practice in Kensington which turned out to be such a glorious lemon. It was the wrong area or the wrong time or the wrong something. The sick never found their way to his door. What a curious little hell that had turned into. The hours and hours of reading in the front parlour converted to a consulting room where consultations hardly ever took place. Yet the reading became as much a consolation as the booze for a while. Somewhere in a book, he felt, he was going to find a point of reference—some revelation of what it was all about, instead of the vague anxieties which had always lurked in the back of his mind. For a week, perhaps, Chaucer would seem the answer—indulgent irony, an amused detachment. But then he would come up against Carlyle, look down with Teufelsdröckh into the abyss, wonder again if it was ever possible to ignore your own potential for evil. Or Fielding would persuade him for a few days that nothing mattered very much—it was all a bit of fun to be savoured and enjoyed—and then he would collide headlong with Dostoievski's Underground Man and look up at the faded wallpaper of the parlour in dismay.

The doctor rubbed his nose moodily. Betty's father had been very good to them. They hung on for more than a year—but it was a hopeless situation from the start. Forbidden to advertise for patients or to go out looking for them, the doctor could only sit, waiting futilely for a doorbell or a telephone which never rang.

That was when it started, of course—really started. Rather than face Betty in the evenings he took to slipping round the corner to the pub, spending

the last of the money they borrowed from his father-in-law. Her dreams of something not far from Harley Street were shattered so quickly, and she would be sitting up in bed when he got back from the pub, crying and screaming a profanity at him which some childish part of his mind had never expected her to know. All so like a bad novel. He was even forced to go to sea for a year--ship's surgeon on a Union-Castle boat plying between Southampton and Capetown, reading still, to fill the long empty days, but reading as an addict now; reading with the growing certainty that when all the vast accumulation of words had been digested nothing would have changed. He began to drink really heavily, and to sleep more and more often with attractive girls, made quick and uncontrollably voluptuous by the tropical heat; girls who felt sorry for the lonely doctor. They were all convinced he had suffered some unspeakable tragedy and he did nothing to disillusion them, satisfying them when he could and feeling as bleak and empty afterwards as the featureless horizon of the sea which bisected his porthole.

When offered his present job it had seemed a providential opportunity to make a fresh start, to straighten himself out before it was too late. That was how alcoholics always thought, he reflected sardonically. They were always on the point of making fresh starts, always rationalizing. They didn't drink because they liked it or were frightened or weak and contemptible--they drank to be sociable. Pack of lies. It was a form of mental masturbation. One drank to isolate oneself in a deliciously intent and lascivious contemplation of nothing but oneself. I am onanistic bloody I....

"Excuse me a minute," said Vickers, and went out to investigate the sudden flurry of shouts and yells outside the building. He returned almost at once. "Where does this specimen Amanquah come into this?" he inquired.

"Well, he's one of the guiding lights in the union, and we thought it'd be a good idea to have him along," Arthur replied.

"Perhaps. But did you tell the constable on duty to make sure he didn't go anywhere?"

"No, I did," said George.

"Pushing it a bit. Next thing we'll have him kicking up a fuss about illegal detention."

"Leave him to me. I'll take care of any of that sort of nonsense."

"We've got to be very careful now, you know."

"Don't worry. He's probably put them up to this little dodge. I'll settle his hash for him if he starts getting out of hand."

Vickers turned a worried face to the door, looking relieved when Peter Chard walked through it. In spite of his depression, the doctor smiled. Chard was such a delightful caricature of what one expected a colonial policeman to be. He was a powerfully built young man with a brick-red complexion, innocent blue eyes and an expression of implacable confidence. He made one feel that nothing was ever really very complicated.

"Righto," he said cheerfully, when Vickers finished. "Let's get cracking. I'm playing tennis at five."

The village was a little cluster of palm-thatched huts in a clearing by the side of the road. There was one larger building in the middle of the clearing, roofed with empty kerosine tins beaten flat. Chickens not much bigger than pigeons were scratching listlessly in the dirt, and three or four emaciated dogs, who came out briefly to bark at the vehicles, flopped down again in the shade by the mud wall, their tongues lolling out. They parked in the shade of a knarled old Shea tree and within moments they were surrounded by children who stood in a circle round the two vehicles, gazing at them with wrapt attention. They were all naked, and the boys stood pulling at their penises with one hand while they mechanically brushed flies off their faces with the other. No wonder Negroes were so well equipped, thought Reggie. They spent the first ten or twelve years of their lives stretching their tools. Chard sent one of the constables to fetch the headman of the village and he was a long time coming. He was a little, wizened old man with an almost unbelievably dirty cloth wrapped round his body. He looked very nervous.

"What's he so jittery about?" Reggie asked.

"Soon find out," Chard replied briskly, and began to question him, using the constable as an interpreter. The old man shook his head repeatedly. "Hmm, see no evil, hear no evil..." Chard grunted sardonically. "Ask him where the grave is," he told the constable. "And bring those three out of the lorry—don't forget the spades."

They began to move across the hard packed laterite of the clearing, the headman still shrugging and shaking his head, while the children pressed closer about them, their eyes wide with excitement.

"Well, there is a grave, anyway," said Vickers, as they stood beside the mound of freshly turned earth a few yards into the undergrowth at the edge of the clearing. He signalled to the constables. They took off their heavy, dark blue tunics, threw them on a bush and began to dig. Reggie glanced at the father and brother of the dead boy. They were standing looking down at

the ground, their faces blank. He took out his handkerchief and mopped his neck, wondering how far you had to dig before you could prove there was nothing in a grave. The crowd about them was growing rapidly as miners began to return from the morning shift on their bicycles, skidding to a stop with little spurts of dust and making eager inquiries. Looking round at them again he began to feel uneasy. Why, if the grave was empty, were they all looking at it with an almost obscene intentness? Just then one of the constables grunted and bent down to brush away the dirt with his hand. So there was a body, after all; and there would be an inquest with all sorts of veiled allusions to alcoholism and negligence.

A collective groan of satisfaction rose from the crowd as the two constables cleared the last of the earth away from the body and lifted it out of the shallow grave. It was wrapped in a piece of discarded canvas filter cloth from the mill, tied up with two or three lengths of blasting twine. They couldn't undo the knots and no one had a knife. One of the constables put his foot on the body as he strained at the twine to break it. To Reggie it was a moment of fascinating incongruity. Hamlet's gravediggers, he thought, turning to look at Vicker's thin and intensely serious face. For a shocking moment he thought a gross chuckle was going to burst from his throat—but George's crisp voice pulled him up before it was too late.

"Haven't you got a cigarette lighter, Reggie?"

"Yes—yes I have."

"Well use that to burn through the twine."

"Good idea." Reggie pushed the constable away and held the flame of his lighter under the twine. He knelt beside the body, lifted up the cloth and looked at the boy's face. Almost at once he dropped the cloth again and gazed past the body into the empty grave for a long time before turning to speak to Chard over his shoulder.

"Did you bring a camera?"

"A camera?" Chard and Vickers exchanged startled glances. "No," said Chard. "But I can easily get one if you want."

"Yes, do that will you please. We won't need a post mortem to prove how he died. A snapshot'll be quite sufficient."

"Oh?"

"Take a look for yourselves. He's had his head bashed in. Drill steel, at a guess. Doesn't look very pretty because of the maggots."

Reggie stood up. The crowd had pressed forward and only the empty grave

prevented them from leaning over the body. Chard suddenly bellowed at them and the constables began to push them back. The four Europeans moved forward, leaning down, as Chard lifted the cloth. They gazed at the boy's mutilated head for a few seconds, then turned away.

"Christ Almighty!" said Vickers. "What they won't do for money."

"You mean...?" Arthur looked at him incredulously. "Are you suggesting they deliberately beat his brains out so that they could collect the compensation money?"

"What else?"

"They're still savages," Arthur sighed. "Only a savage could do something as revolting as this." He turned to look at the father and brother, who were still gazing at the ground expressionlessly.

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Chard, his quick bark of cheerful laughter ringing out across the clearing. "If you'd spent a couple of years with me on the beat in Liverpool, you wouldn't say that."

## CHAPTER 13

"The trouble with you," said Nkrumah contemptuously, "is that you're bone lazy. You want to be a leader, but not to learn the things a leader must know."

Kwotze rubbed his nose and kept his eyes down on the table. Some distant corner of his mind acknowledged that what Nkrumah said was true. If he'd worked hard at school, he too might have gone to Achimota, earned scholarships that would have taken him out into the white man's world and provided him with qualifications for leadership which couldn't be questioned. But it was a small, dim gleam of intelligence which quickly faded.

"Is not needing all this," he repeated doggedly. "All time talk, talk—we no do...."

"You've never once stopped to think about the future, have you?" Nkrumah demanded. "About what'll happen after we've got our independence? What kind of government we're going to need—how we're going to prevent other people exploiting us when the British are gone?"

"Is not palaver...."

"Not to you, of course, because you've never even thought about it. You're still an ignorant village boy with a talent for rabble-rousing. That's useful just at present, but it won't do you any good in the future. Now, do you want me to tell you about these things? Or do you want to remain what you are—an ignorant fool?"

"I am fit to listen," said Kwotze sulkily.

It was a good lecture Nkrumah delivered; one which Kwotze, in spite of his resentment, found easy to understand for once. It was the Americans and the Russians, he kept repeating, who held the key not only to independence for Africans, but to future power as well. The Americans were hard at it forcing the British to give up their colonial possessions. Even before the war was over, Roosevelt had put the pressure on them—and India was free already. They talked piously of freedom and equality and democracy, but their real motives, of course, were purely selfish. With the British out of the way,

Americans could move in and exploit underdeveloped countries themselves.

Nkrumah smiled. He had been there. He knew. Blandly ignoring their own Negroes, the Americans were determined to emancipate African Negroes. In fact, they had the same low opinion of African intelligence and ability as the British did, and this was the mistake from which Africans could profit handsomely. All they needed to do for the moment was feign gratitude for American assistance while causing so much trouble that the British, who were nearly bankrupt after the war, would give up and get out. Then Africans, if they played their cards right, could pit America against Russia. Both countries were eager to provide financial assistance so that they could get an economic foothold in Africa. So if Africans played the two against each other, they could get money from both without surrendering their independence to either. And one day, with all Africa united, they themselves would be richer and more powerful than either.

Nkrumah's eyes shone with an almost religious fervour as he finished speaking, and in spite of himself, Kwotze was swept along for a moment by his vision. But it was a brief persuasion; Nkrumah's treachery on the night they were nearly arrested was still too fresh in his mind.

"Is true, what you saying," he agreed. "But we no do these things. All time talk, talk...."

Nkrumah shook his head and smiled. "Not any longer," he said. "I've got a job for you—one that'll give you the chance you've been waiting for."

"Yo?"

"I'm sending you to Kuwassi to organize a branch of the Convention there. The Mineworkers Union have been very active...they've already had some minor disturbances. You could easily turn them into major ones. And you'll be entirely on your own—a fine opportunity to prove what you can do."

The idea caught Kwotze off balance. He knew that what Nkrumah said was true—Kuwassi was already a trouble spot, with a large population of ex-servicemen. On the one hand it seemed a golden opportunity; on the other he was afraid it might be a trick to get him out of Accra before he became too influential. He refused to commit himself on the spot and Nkrumah, amused by his hesitancy, did not press him. But at a meeting the following evening, he announced the decision as though Kwotze had already agreed to go.

Kwotze looked up the table at Danquah to see what his reaction was. His face was impassive. He and Nkrumah had obviously discussed it and made up their minds. It would be very hard for Kwotze to refuse now. He moved

uncomfortably in his chair, convinced he was being manipulated.

"I will be needing moneys," he said.

"Of course," said Nkrumah smoothly. "And as soon as you've got your branch set up, you can start collecting dues."

"How much you give me for start?" Kwotze insisted.

"Dr. Danquah and I will discuss that later and decide how much we can let you have."

Kwotze looked around the table. They seemed almost eager to get rid of him. "I will be needing new suit," he said, turning back to Danquah.

Danquah took off his glasses and began to polish them with a clean white handkerchief. "You think that is good idea?" he asked. "These are all mining peoples. You are wearing new clothes, maybe they think you are just being city man...."

"These are only details, and we can discuss them later," Nkrumah broke in. "If everyone's in agreement that Kwotze should go to Kuwassi to set up a new branch there, perhaps we can get on with the agenda. I have some interesting news from Takoradi...."

Kwotze heard practically nothing of the rest of the meeting. His thoughts kept swinging from visions of startling success in Kuwassi to visions of exile while the movement triumphed without him in Accra. But in the back of his mind he realized he would have to go. He couldn't defy the whole committee. He spent a miserable forty-eight hours trying to think of some way to delay his departure; and, when that failed, to reassure himself that Kuwassi really did represent a shining opportunity. He decided to make a rigid stand on the issue of clothes, Nkrumah finally gave way, and Kwotze's distress was alleviated to a considerable degree by the new, chocolate-brown lounge suit he was wearing when he left for the station on Saturday.

Late the following morning, his train shuddered to a halt in a little station some thirty miles from Kuwassi. Kwotze opened his eyes and grimaced. Pain stabbed across the back of his neck as he straightened up and rubbed the deep marks on his cheeks made by the slats of the wooden seat-back. He looked out of the window resentfully at the crowd of Africans waiting to board the train. It was too full already and he would be jammed even further into the corner of the cramped wooden bench in his third-class compartment.

"Where are we?" he asked the plump girl sitting next to him.

"Abontiakoon," she replied, her eyes wide with excitement as she leaned forward to look past him out of the window. She, too, was going to Kuwassi.



She was on her way to marry a miner who had only worked there for six months, but earned enough in that time to satisfy her father and pay for her rail fare. She had expected to wait at least two years and was almost beside herself with excitement, chattering away to him all the way from Takoradi until, in the end, he closed his eyes and fell asleep more or less in self-defence. Her happiness irritated him, as did her plumpness. Practically everyone, he realized angrily as he looked round the packed compartment, seemed not only well fed but thoroughly contented with their lot. The fools didn't even know they were being exploited by the white man.

Kwotze pulled out a bright red handkerchief and mopped his face. It was unbearably hot when the train stopped moving, and a massive woman with a baby wrapped in the mammy-cloth across her back pushed determinedly between his seat and the one opposite, forcing him to tuck his feet under him. The baby was asleep, its head lolling sideways only a foot or two from his own. A streak of saliva hung down its chin and Kwotze began to worry that it would dribble on his brand new trousers. Looking out of the window again, he saw two Europeans stroll by, cool and relaxed after emerging from their first-class carriage with its fan and its upholstered seats. Why no second-class? he thought bitterly. One either had to be a European or travel in squalor—packed in with snot-nosed babies and babbling virgins who smelled of sex as they went to mate. He pulled his cuff back and glanced at his wrist watch, pleased in spite of himself because the girl beside him was so obviously impressed. At least he'd won that battle: the new suit, the shirt, the watch, the sleek brown shoes. For hours he'd argued that it was pointless for him to move into a new area as an organizer looking like somebody's houseboy. A leader, after all, must look the part. It had obviously stung Nkrumah badly to have to give way in the end; but Kwotze wished now he'd packed the suit and decided to travel in shorts. It was getting horribly wrinkled and the sweat was beginning to soak right through.

He saw the guard walk over to the two Europeans, smiling obsequiously as he spoke to them. Evidently he was warning them the train was about to depart. They nodded and turned to stroll leisurely back to their compartment. An African asked the guard something. The guard shrugged, put his whistle to his lips and blew it importantly. The man gripped his arm, gesticulating excitedly with his other hand as he spoke to him. The train gave a sudden lurch and the guard flung the man off impatiently, began to run back along the platform to his van. Those were the sort of people they would deal with first,

thought Kwotze savagely; idiots who fawned on Europeans, then contemptuously flung off members of their own race.

The train ground to a halt again in Kartwa, where nearly half the passengers left Kwotze's compartment. He went out onto the platform to stretch his legs, still irritated by the cheerfulness and complacency of the crowds as they greeted friends and relatives come to meet them, piled their possessions on their heads and left the station. He saw the two Europeans again, gazing superciliously at the Africans as they strolled aimlessly up and down the platform. But this was his territory now, Kwotze thought, with a sudden thrill of pleasure. These were his people, to be drawn together, inspired, moulded into an effective weapon. Soon they would be roaring approval as he addressed them. If he succeeded—and he was going to succeed—there was no reason why he shouldn't emerge as the real leader of the independence movement. Already the Europeans were beginning to look at him uneasily. He had let his hair grow out and this, together with the new clothes, seemed to disturb them. He turned and walked back to his compartment as the guard blew his whistle. For the twenty minutes it took the train to reach Kuwassi, he sat looking out of the window at the little hills, allowing his imagination to conjure up fascinating visions of power. He might easily become the first African prime minister of his country. He saw himself driving through the streets of Accra in gleaming black limousines with pennants fluttering; heard huge crowds cheering as he walked briskly up the steps of the Legislative Assembly; watched white men walking deferentially across the room to his desk....

But when he climbed down off the train in Kuwassi with his suitcase in his hand, there was no one to meet him. The two Europeans were greeted by a small crowd of people, including wives. They stood talking comfortably while servants hurried to fetch their luggage from the guard's van. The luggage was loaded into a lorry, the Europeans climbed into two large cars and drove off. Kwotze looked around sulkily at the dwindling crowd of passengers, picked up his suitcase and began to walk towards the ticket-collector's gate. As he passed the waiting rooms, two people suddenly emerged from behind the building and hurried over to him. One was barefoot, dressed in a singlet and ragged shorts; the other in shoes, with clean khaki shorts, a shirt and a black tie.

"Mistah Baru?" the better dressed of the two asked, looking about him nervously.

"Yes."

"Am Joseph Dunkwah. This Kwela Muru."

They shook hands, Dunkwah still looking around anxiously. "I must stay only little--am being away from office. Muru is night shift. He look for you until I am finishing work five o'clock."

Kwotze nodded, irritated by Dunkwah's nervousness. They were here to start a revolution and all he could think about was his silly little job--skulking behind buildings in case one of the almighty Europeans happened to spot him. "When I go meet all peoples who are wanting join United Convention?" he asked.

"We have good plan--very important plan," Dunkwah replied. "Tonight is committee meeting of Ex-Serviceman's Association--we go changem to United Convention. Muru tell you all these things. I go now and see you for my house for five o'clock. We make important palaver tonight."

Dunkwah hurried off behind the building and a moment or two later Kwotze saw him pedalling furiously along the road towards the steep hill which led up to the mine. He turned to walk out of the station with Muru. When he surrendered his ticket at the gate he found a constable standing beside the ticket-collector. The constable asked his name, nodded when he told him and set off briskly along the road to the police station. Kwotze's confidence came surging back to him. He was no longer an obscure clerk, forced to work for Syrians, but a man to be watched and feared. The news of his arrival would be all over Kuwassi in a few hours, and people would be waiting eagerly to see him for the first time.

"What is palaver with Mineworker's Union?" he asked Muru.

"All same Ex-Serviceman's Association. First we go make Ex-Serviceman's for Convention, then Union."

"How many members is for Ex-Serviceman's Association?"

"This time is four hundred and eighty-three."

Kwotze turned to him sharply. "Four hundred...? They go pay any moneys? Somebody is collecting...?"

"Yo, is plenty moneys. All members paying five shilling a month. Mine massas, they take moneys from pay and put in bank. Is lots...hundred-twenty pound every month."

Kwotze stopped dead in his tracks, gazing at Muru incredulously. "One hundred-twenty! And we can get this moneys?"

"We will be doing this thing tonight at committee meeting. First we

will have meeting at Dunkwah's house when is finishing work."

Kwotze let out his breath in a sigh of pure joy. A hundred and twenty pounds a month was more than they could count on in Accra. With funds like that at his disposal he could afford to set up an organization which couldn't possibly fail. Even in his fondest dreams, his most optimistic moments, he hadn't contemplated anything like this. He walked along the road to the compound, watching the tiny scimitars of red dust spurt up between Muru's toes and trying to concentrate on what he was saying. Instead, he kept seeing himself in an endless variety of expensive suits, in big cars, in a huge office, an even bigger house with servants gliding swiftly across carpeted floors to obey him.

## CHAPTER 14

Anson looked up from his book as Amadou came into the room with an armfull of clean laundry.

"My bath ready yet?" he asked.

"Be ready small-small. Piccanin go fillum one time."

Anson turned the corner of the page down to mark his place and tossed the book onto his bed. He stood up and stretched lazily. "Tell Obang I'll be in for chop at half-past seven," he said, moving across the room to pick up his towel and soap. As he walked towards the combined lavatory and bath house at the corner of the building he saw Charles Liddell emerge from the lavatory.

"Any trouble with cobras lately?" he inquired.

Charles refused to look at him. His face was tight with resentment as he walked up the concrete steps to his room. The snake incident had occurred a few days previously and it was already being recounted on other mines. Liddell was terrified of snakes, and even though there was a light in the bath house, he always took a torch with him when he visited it after dark. On this occasion the batteries in his torch had given out. Anson was lying on his bed reading. He was on the point of switching off his light when he heard Liddell's screen door bang, then, perhaps two or three minutes later, a piercing shriek which brought him off the bed and out to the steps of his room in one bound. Liddell was standing on the concrete walkway which ran along the side of the bungalow, his shorts round his ankles, one hand clutching his backside.

"A snake," he gasped. "It was in the pan and it got me."

"Good God!" said Anson. He ran quickly down the steps and took Charles by the elbow to lead him up to his room.

"I mustn't move," Charles shouted, shrugging Anson's hand away. "That makes the poison circulate faster."

"Don't be silly. Come and lie down. I may be able to suck the poison out or something."

Reluctantly Charles stepped out of his shorts and allowed himself to be led up the stairs and into his room. Henry Fuller had come to his door.

"Phone the doctor," Anson told him, peremptorily. "He's been bitten by a snake."

Charles moved slowly across the room, still clutching one buttock. His face was as white as the ceiling and he was breathing heavily. Anson wondered if the poison could have started to take effect already. He got him to lie face down on the bed, then had to struggle with him to remove the hand. Fully expecting to see two angry little punctures, he found nothing. Moving his head out of the light, he bent closer to look again.

"Touch the place where it hurts. I can't see anything."

Charles did so and Anson searched in vain for any sign of an injury.

"Just isn't anything there, Charles. Are you sure there was a snake in the bog?"

"Leave me alone until the doctor gets here," Charles replied, closing his eyes.

"Okay. I'll get my torch and go have a look."

Anson went back to his room, picked up his torch and returned to the bath house. Amadou, Obang, and one of Obang's sons had come to see what had happened. They were standing, their eyes wide and apprehensive in the light from the bath house.

"Snake," said Anson tersely, walking past them with the torch while they uttered little clucks and hisses of dismay. He pushed the door of the lavatory open and shone the beam around the little room cautiously. Stepping forward, he looked down into the pan and let out a sudden exclamation. The Africans crowded round him, at once nervous and fascinated. In the bottom of the bowl, just where the porcelain slanted down into the water, was a very small frog.

Obang choked suddenly, then they were all laughing. Anson found himself punching Amadou on the shoulder and shaking his head and gasping for breath. All the smutty, lavatorial jokes of his prep-school days paled into insignificance beside the mental image of the frog, leaping frantically to avoid an excremental disaster. Their laughter was almost hysterical. When the doctor arrived some ten minutes later they were still incoherent and Anson kept bursting into giggles as he tried to explain what had happened.

He chuckled again while he waited for Dhusa, Obang's twelve-year-old son to pour the last bucket of hot water into the bath. He turned on the cold tap and swirled the water around with his hand until it had reached a comfortable temperature, then stepped in and lay back with a sigh. It was a funny business,

he thought. When they had seen the frog he felt an extraordinary kinship with the servants; wanted to put his arm round their shoulders while they laughed, in fact. Yet only a day or two previously, when he heard about the boy being beaten to death for his compensation money, he experienced an equally strong revulsion against all Africans. Anson chased a fragment of leaf in the water. It stayed just in front of his hand, slid under his thigh and then up between his legs, turning over lazily. He snatched at it and missed again, depressed all at once as he remembered he had to go to another committee meeting of the Ex-Servicemen's Association in a few minutes.

After he finished his bath, Anson sat in his Morris chair with a towel wrapped round his waist, cool and comfortable for a little while. He could do with a drink—a long cold gin and tonic. But he didn't have any gin in the bungalow. He would have to borrow it from Henry, and Henry would insist on joining him. He stood up and began to get dressed as he heard the fifteen hundredweight grinding its way slowly up the hill. It was library night at the club. Daphne had taken over the job of librarian and Anson grimaced angrily at the thought that he would have to spend the next hour or more in futile argument with Africans whose only concern lay in the possibility of grabbing the Association's funds for themselves. The library was never busy. Anson would fetch Daphne a drink and sit with her in the little annex off the billiard room. They would be alone for ten and fifteen minutes at a time, and he no longer tried to keep up the pretense that he didn't want to be alone with her. There was a delicious tension between them now and their conversation flirted with the knowledge yet always fell short of commitment. In the library, somehow, their intimacy seemed at once more complete and more dangerously exhilarating. They would sit beside one another at the table, while George drank his ritual sundowners on the verandah, always on the alert to switch the conversation to books when anyone came in to scrutinize them with sharp, inquisitive eyes.

He was just about to climb into the lorry when Henry Fuller came to the door and asked him to wait. He wanted to go to the club. Anson had to sit for nearly fifteen minutes, growing more and more irritable. He got out twice and shouted at Henry, threatening the second time to leave without him. Henry came down the steps at last, grumbling that he had as much right to use the lorry as Anson. He cleared his throat and nodded peevishly when Anson made him get in first and sit next to the driver. Clouds of dust swirled around them as they rolled down the hill, and even though Henry was smoking one of his foul-smelling

cigars, Anson was forced to wind the window up. The rainy season was still a couple of months away, he reflected, longing for rain. But by then he would be on leave--or gone for good. Somehow, he must make up his mind during the next few days.

Brushing as much of the dust off his shirt and trousers as he could, he walked up the steps to his office. There was no sign of any of the committee members. He left the door open and walked to the back of the building. It was almost dark and a watchman was leaning against the verandah wall, dozing. He started violently when Anson spoke, just above his head. Anson told him to send the committee members to his office when they arrived, returned to it and sat smoking a cigarette while he watched a lizard stalk a moth on the ceiling. It moved so slowly and remorselessly that Anson began to fidget. He blew smoke up at the moth. Its wings stirred, but it refused to budge. He stood up abruptly. The lizard froze like a mechanical toy, two legs forward on one side, two back on the other. Anson waved his hand under the moth, but in the end he had to climb on a chair and flick it off the ceiling. He watched it for a moment or two, circling stupidly round the light, then looked down and discovered that the committee had arrived. They were standing in the doorway, gazing at him with blank faces. He climbed down off the chair, feeling foolish, and glanced at his watch.

"Nice of you to bother. It's nearly twenty past."

Sitting down at the head of the table, he suddenly realized there was a newcomer present: a tall, heavy African with a shock of frizzy hair that stood up like a golliwog's, yet oddly enough looked perfectly natural on him.

"Who's this?" he demanded, turning to Dunkwah.

"This man he come to meeting tonight."

"Is he a member of the Association?"

"No sah. He is United Convention...."

"Oh, then it'll be Mr. Baru, I imagine? You came in on today's train, eh?"

"Is right. I am being Kwotze Baru."

Anson studied him thoughtfully, wondering what they were going to try to pull this time. Kwotze, he suspected, was going to be a stiffer challenge than the rest of them had been. He spoke much more confidently and somehow managed to avoid the impression of fancy dress in his European suit. His attitude, too, was less defensive or aggressive or whatever it was that made the others so easy to push into a corner.

"Well, I have no objections to him sitting in, if you haven't. We have



nothing to hide. But he'll only be an observer, of course--he won't be able to speak...."

Amanquah was shaking his head and Dunkwah broke in belligerently. "He is speaking...."

"No, he's not," said Anson, more sharply than he intended. "This is a committee meeting, and he's not even a member of the Association. If he has anything to say, he can say it after the meeting's over. Amanquah, will you go into Mr. Pemberton's office and fetch another chair please?"

Amanquah left the room at once to fetch the chair, but before he returned Kwotze sat down at the end of the table opposite Anson. So it was to be a confrontation all right, no doubt about that, and Anson lit another cigarette, trying to anticipate what form it would take.

"Do you mind if I ask where you were educated?" he asked Kwotze, as Amanquah pushed his chair in above Muru along the side of the table.

"At school."

Anson looked at him for a moment, then smiled as he picked a piece of tobacco off his lip. "Where they obviously didn't bother to teach you any manners." He turned to Dunkwah. "Okay, I declare this meeting open. May we have the minutes of the last one please?"

Dunkwah read them, stumbling over the difficult and inappropriate words he had culled from the dictionary.

"Thank you," said Anson, when he finished. "In the last paragraph, or minute, where you say that the motion was carried anonymously, I presume you meant unanimously, didn't you?"

"No sah. I means everyone speaks yes."

Anson shrugged. "All right. Let me have the minutes afterwards, and I'll correct them. Any discussion? Good, who'll propose adoption?" No one replied, and Anson looked around the table, rubbing his chin. He glanced at his watch and sat back. "Well, what seems to be the problem? We confirmed another nine loans and agreed to leave ten pounds in the bank as a working fund. Then, after a good deal of discussion, we agreed to try running a dance in the village hall with the remaining ten."

Anson raise his eyebrows and looked around at them again. But only Kwotze returned his gaze. The rest kept their eyes on the table. He smiled to himself. What the hell did one do now? If they refused, they refused. Fortunately, he had made sure the cheques for the loans went out, so there was only a little over twenty pounds in the kitty.

"What's the problem, then? We can't undo what we did last time—the cheques for the loans have gone out."

"Will be no dance," said Dunkwah.

"Oh, why not? I thought it was rather a good idea. Sort of get people together and let them realize that there really is an association."

"Mr. Kwotze will speak for this thing."

"Uh-uh." Anson held up his hand at once. "This is a committee matter and Kwotze is not going to speak. If you want to reopen the question of the dance, do so by all means. I'm intrigued to know what your objections are all of a sudden."

Kwotze sat comfortably in his chair, a faint smile on his lips. He looked so much at ease that Anson had to resist the temptation to try and ruffle him.

"The money will be wasting in a dance," said Dunkwah abruptly. "Now we are giving all moneys to United Convention People's Party for finding independence."

"Blow me down!" said Anson, shaking his head. "So you really do think you can just take over the funds for whatever purpose you like? Well, let's get this straight, right away. This association has got absolutely nothing to do with the United Convention, or independence--and not a penny will go to them while I'm chairman...."

"How did you becoming chairman?" Kwotze asked.

"I...." Anson stopped and shook his head again. "No, my friend, I'm not going to be tricked into any discussion with you until this meeting is over."

Kwotze shrugged and Anson chewed his lip, wondering what to do. With Kwotze present, it was obvious that none of the committee members were going to back down. There was a question of face involved. "Look," he said eventually, "I'm going to adjourn this meeting until next Monday. Put that down in your minutes," he instructed Dunkwah, and waited, trying to collect his thoughts while Dunkwah wrote it down. "Now, let me put it to you very simply. This is an organization to assist ex-servicemen. It has nothing whatsoever to do with politics. And because of this, no money collected from the members is going for political purposes. Is this understood?"

"What if members deciding yes?" Kwotze asked.

"Well...well, then it won't be the Ex-Servicemen's Association any more. They'll have to draft a new constitution—and find a new chairman."

"We are now doing this thing. Meeting is holding tomorrow night."

Anson looked down at the table. What a blessing it was that they were at a disadvantage with the language. But Anson was disconcerted by Kwotze's lack of vehemence. It was so much easier to handle them when they became angry and incoherent, as Dunkwah and Amanquah always did. "You can't," he said cheerfully. "There has to be at least a month's notice before a General Meeting can be held."

"Not be so if all members saying yes."

Anson was about to speak, but he paused as the siren blared out and glanced automatically at his watch. It was a quarter to seven, and the siren was a warning to the lashing shift that they had fifteen minutes to get to the shaft. Odd how difficult it was to adjust to something like this, he thought, while he waited for it to stop. He had unquestioningly accepted a sort of imperishable permanency about the association. Yet if the members really did want to turn it into something entirely different overnight, there was absolutely nothing he could do to stop them. He remembered reading somewhere that this was always the case in a revolution--everyone was always caught unawares. The revolutionaries were as surprised as the people who were trying to prevent it.

"Okay," he agreed. "You're right, of course. If that's what the members really want--that's what it'll have to be. But I suspect you'll have a good deal of trouble collecting dues from now on."

Kwotze smiled complacently. "Is coming one hundred twenty-three pounds Wednesday from company."

Anson burst out laughing. "What a bloody hope! Tell me, what is the United Convention Party planning to do if they succeed in achieving independence--about the mines, I mean? Aren't you planning to take them over and chuck all the Europeans out?"

"Will be nationalize, yes."

"Precisely. And you've got the incredible gall to think that this company is going to go on taking the time and trouble to deduct money from the miner's pay.... No, you can't be that stupid, surely?"

Kwotze's smile had disappeared. For the first time he looked less than sure of himself. So he, too, had been relying on some non-existent permanence, thought Anson, feeling reassured.

"How you go stop it?" Kwotze demanded, falling back more and more on pidgin English.

"Easiest thing in the world." Anson paused deliberately to brush the smoke from his cigarette away from his face before continuing. "I'll tell the company—the General Manager—that the members want to dissolve the association, and the company won't make any more deductions."

"Then we will have strike."

"What, because the company won't collect money so that you can throw them out? Come off it, for Christ's sake—you're supposed to be a leader. You won't last long if you start talking bloody nonsense like this."

"We will be having all the moneys...."

"You won't, you know. You can't get your greedy paws on it without the signature of the chairman—and I'm the chairman."

"Tomorrow, no be so...."

"That doesn't make any difference, because tomorrow it won't be the same association. We've got about twenty-two pounds in the bank at the moment, and I'm going to work out how much that comes to for each member—all four hundred and eighty odd of them—and make sure they get it back. After that it's their own business what they do with it."

"You will be stop. United Convention go stop you."

"Oh, shut up! There've been times when I thought I sympathised with you people, but when you start drivelling like this, it makes it painfully obvious how immature you really are. Go on, get out now. I'm sick of wasting my time on this farce called an association."

The committee sat for a few seconds, sullenly refusing to move. "Go on, beat it," said Anson. "This is my office and you haven't taken that over yet."

They stood up finally, and began to shuffle towards the door. Kwotze pushed his chair back so violently it slid across the floor and banged against the wall. He turned in the doorway to look at Anson and pointed a stark finger at him. "We will going to win," he snarled.

Anson smiled. "Yes, I know—we will overcome. You've got nothing to lose but your chains. Go on, bugger off. You make me tired."

He sat for a little while after they left, fiddling with his cigarette tin. So he could still do it, he thought. Recently he had begun to feel that he was losing his touch with Africans, but he had just faced down one of the top agitators in the country. Why, then, did he still feel a little guilty? The seven o'clock siren interrupted his thoughts and he pushed back his chair. The library didn't close until half-past, and he would be able to talk to Daphne for a little while. Locking the office door, he walked quickly across

to the club. George was sitting with the Thorntons and the Coopers at the far end of the lounge. They didn't see him and he slipped into the billiard room. Bill Gilby was playing with Tom Mackey, one of the shiftbosses. He paused in the middle of a shot, straightened up and reached for the chalk as Anson came in.

"You changed your books yet?" he asked Tom.

Tom looked at him blankly. "Reckon we better leave this game and get some books," said Bill, inspecting the tip of his cue critically. "The library'll be closed in another few minutes."

"Oh, you're such a witty fellow," said Anson, walking past them. Bill chuckled with satisfaction as he bent down over the billiard table again.

Daphne looked up with a quick smile. "Hallo sweetie, you're late tonight."

"I wish you wouldn't call me that."

"Oh, what would you like me to call you, then?"

"What's wrong with my name?"

"I don't know. It makes you sound too old, somehow."

"In fact, you want to treat me like a little boy?"

"A very attractive little boy."

Anson sat on the edge of the table looking down at her. He was still trying to decide what it was about her face that made it so lovely. It wasn't monkeyish as he had so often told himself; it was—it was French, he realized suddenly, pleased with himself. Something to do with the cheekbones and the fact that her mouth was slightly prominent, with sharply defined lips. He felt an almost intolerable urge to lean down and kiss her.

"Been busy?" he asked.

"Not very. But I've had lots of inquiries about where the assistant librarian had got to tonight."

"Does it bother you?"

"No. I love it. Every woman likes to feel that she's a femme fatale."

"You like playing with me, don't you?"

"Mm, we are in a bad mood. What happened—sticky meeting?"

"Oh, it all went up in smoke. They wanted to grab our funds for the United Convention...that's their so-called independence party. Thought we were going to go on deducting dues from the boys to give to them so they could chuck us out. I've had it. I'm going to see the Old Man after supper and tell him I'm going to wind the whole thing up."

"Don't take it all so seriously. You're getting as bad as George."

"It's not a joke, you know. We really are going to have trouble with them soon."

"They won't harm us," said Daphne, closing the book she had been reading. "They're rather nice. If only you wouldn't be so pompous with them."

"That's what everyone says when they first come out. Wait till you've been here a few more months."

Daphne stood up. She smoothed her dress down, then walked across to replace the book. She began to slide the glass doors shut and lock them. "Never mind," she said. "You've only got another few weeks to go and your tour's over. You don't have to come back."

Anson sat looking at her resentfully. She really didn't care whether he came back or not, he thought angrily. "Then I suppose you'll get somebody else to fall in love with you and make a fool of himself. What about Andy Seutar—or Charles Liddell...?"

Daphne turned the key in the last of the glass doors and turned to walk back to the table. She picked up her handbag and slipped the key into it. "Has it ever occurred to you sweetie," she said, looking up into Anson's face with an oddly wistful expression, "that I might be a lot cleverer at concealing my feelings than you are?" She touched his cheek for a moment with her fingers. "Don't spoil it by getting nasty."

Anson watched her walk through the door into the billiard room. He felt too depressed even to go into the lounge for a drink. Bill Gilby stuck his head round the door, grinning suggestively. "What's up, son? Nothing doing tonight?"

## CHAPTER 15

Daphne tried to catch George's eye, but he was too deeply engrossed in John Hampton's anecdote about a boss boy who had fallen down some hole underground and been killed. It was too bad. She had got hold of a decent piece of beef at last, kept enough potatoes from the last shipment to mix with the yams and taught the cook how to make Yorkshire pudding. Half an hour ago it would have been one of the best meals served by any of the wives on the mine for some time. Now the potatoes would be like rocks, the Yorkshire thin and leathery. She looked around and shrugged to herself. The men's faces were flushed, shining with sweat. Left to themselves they would forget all about dinner, keep on drinking all night. Only George still looked cool and sober.

"I was sitting on a toolbox," said John, in a tone suggesting they would never believe him, "waiting for them to slide the timbers across the raise so we could start putting the steel in for the grizzly. This boss boy pushes an eight by two over it until it's half way across, then calmly walks out onto it. Didn't even have time to yell at him before the plank tipped and he went down the raise. Twelve years he'd been working on the mine...and still he didn't know enough to know...."

"That's nothing...." Wally Manning leaned forward in his chair and began another long story about a boy in the mill who had done something similarly incomprehensible and fallen into an agitator. It had become an obsession, Daphne reflected. If they told each other enough stories about the stupidity and incompetence of Africans, they felt reassured for a little while.

"I wonder if anyone's planning to eat tonight?" she asked Barbara, loudly enough to interrupt Wally's story. They all turned to look at her in surprise. George's frown was indulgent.

"Course we are, love," John Hampton replied. "Just finish this drink." He turned back to Wally who promptly resumed his story.

Daphne closed her eyes for a moment, then reached for her own drink. She glanced at Barbara, saw the expression of satisfaction on her face because this dinner party was going the way of all others. Looking back at the men again, she realized how sadly middle-aged they were, how incapable of enjoying

themselves unless they were guzzling down whiskey. She had been convinced in some silly, inconclusive way that she was escaping the elderly when she left the vicarage. It hadn't been so bad before the war, when her brothers were still home, and they had enough money to live in reasonable comfort. But the war played havoc with her mother's investments and afterwards they were forced to exist on a clergyman's inadequate stipend, watching the gloomy old vicarage deteriorate rapidly while her father tried to keep up appearances with his hatchery and his expensive pedigree gun-dogs, insisting that they still needed a housemaid. She couldn't even afford to spend her clothing coupons. The atmosphere of genteel poverty made any young friends who visited her awkward and embarrassed. Conversations at table invariably reverted to the ridiculous wages domestic servants were asking, or the absurd estimate someone quoted to re-tile the roof, which was beginning to leak all over the house. Yet when people smiled at her parents, she became angry and defensive, certain she looked frumpish in her pre-war clothes, bitterly resenting their well-dressed complacency. The only ones who didn't smile were old: widows and retired civil servants, living on pensions which had suffered a similar erosion. She was twenty-seven when George came to spend his leave with them, and surely nobody could blame her for being scared that she wasn't going to find a husband. He seemed unaware of their poverty, offered the hope of an entirely new and perhaps fascinating life. Sunny tropics, with scads of young, vigorous people all over the place. The vision was an almost consciously deceitful one, but it helped her overcome her uneasiness about him--the disturbing suspicion that he regarded her more as an object than as a human being.

But after the first flush of buying new clothes and feeling gloriously emancipated, she discovered that her only accomplishment was to exchange tiresome complaints about parish affairs for equally tiresome ones about Africans. She should have invited Anson tonight, Daphne reflected wryly. Then at least Barbara would have been catty; there would have been some small currents of animosity to stem this tide of reminiscence about celebrated African stupidity. She let her thoughts drift back to the previous Saturday night, when George left her and went home--the surge of youthful vitality. It was the first time since leaving the Wrens she had really felt alive. She looked sadly down at her hands, recalling the touch of Anson's lips when she kissed him, sitting in the car with that yearning, small-boy look on his face....



"You want me to carve now, my dear?" George was looking at her with a mixture of fondness and authority and she felt herself flush with resentment. She was beginning to hate him, she realized, as she walked out to the kitchen. The cook and Somu were sitting out on the back steps, talking softly to each other and gazing at the red glow of the fires at the bottom of the garden, around which their wives were squatting as they prepared their own evening meals. They stood up as she opened the screen door. Somu murmured something to the cook and he laughed. Their eyes gleamed in the light pouring through the kitchen door and all at once she knew it was shining through her thin cotton dress as well, outlining her body. Her heart beat a little faster, as she heard Somu's unmistakable grunt of appreciation, then she turned away, dismayed at the ripple of excitement she felt.

The soup was a mistake--everybody had soaked up enough liquid already--but it was fresh oxtail soup which she had made herself and she watched angrily as first Wally, then John, put down their spoons after two or three mouthfuls. George carved the beef, cut up the sad flat Yorkshire pudding and Somu, as usual, put the plates down in front of her guests from the wrong side, a faint, pointless grin on his face all the time. She sat at the bottom of the table, trying to respond gracefully to the insincere compliments about the meal.

"A drop of wine?" George looked at her like a schoolmaster prompting a backward pupil.

"Yes, of course. What would you like? We've got...."

"Up to you, m'dear. Isn't it white with fish, red with meat?"

Daphne turned to Somu. "Make you bring bottle from fridge--the long red one."

John Hampton picked up his glass as soon as Somu had filled it, drank more than half the wine in one gulp and began a story about a dinner party on one of the messes which housed the bachelor shiftbosses working in the mill.

"Had a little ritual we always observed. Used to send for the cook... if it was a decent meal, that is, and congratulate him. Barry Sayers--least, I think it was Barry--was chopmaster at the time and he told the houseboy to fetch him. The houseboy came back and we waited for quite a long time. The women were getting restless because there was a dance on."

"'Where the hell is he?' Barry demanded, eventually."

"The houseboy shrugged. 'Massa, he go come small-small. This time he go for shit.'"

Everyone burst out laughing. "That reminds me of the three blokes on

a mess who decided to save money by cooking for themselves," Wally broke in. "One of them agreed to do all the cooking, but only on condition that the first person to complain would have to take over." Daphne looked round at them bleakly as the story they'd all heard at least a dozen times before was repeated. There must be more to it than this, she thought desperately. No one could retain their sanity sitting round tables year after year listening to whiskey flushed faces telling the same smutty little jokes over and over again. Yet George had been here for more than twenty years; he might easily be here another twenty.

"Then on the third night," said Wally, struggling to keep his face straight as he finished the story, "one of them took a mouthful and nearly choked. 'What's this?' he demanded disgustedly, 'pig shit?'"

"'Yes it is,' replied the one who was cook."

"The other looked at him for a long time, then shrugged. 'Hmm—damn well cooked though,' he said finally."

They all burst out laughing again, drank their wine and chuckled with satisfaction at the familiar joke. George's smile was a reflex. He had sunk into a sort of quiet isolation and Daphne glanced quickly at her wrist watch. Another half an hour and she would be able to suggest a move to the club for the dance. She must be casual, though, unenthusiastic, or Barbara would ask why she was in such a hurry. Barbara had already made a point of being surprised that Anson hadn't been invited to dinner. Daphne finished her wine and looked at George again. Yes, tonight they would, she decided. That's what the remote smile meant. Last Saturday he was asleep when Anson brought her home; the week before she was able to tell him quite truthfully she had the headache which, by now, even George understood to mean she was having a period.

"Shall we move to a more comfortable chair for coffee?" she suggested. They agreed at once and she walked across the lounge, wondering if Anson would be at the club yet. Supposing he didn't come? She smiled to herself as she poured the coffee. He'd be there all right. But watching Somu move from chair to chair with the tray of liqueurs, she suffered a stab of anxiety. Something irrevocable and perhaps rather nasty was bound to happen before long. They couldn't go on the way they had for the past two or three months, hovering like adolescents on the brink, afraid to take the plunge. The trouble was, Anson seemed afraid of George, or cherished some ridiculous respect for him. So the initiative would have to come from her; but she still wasn't quite sure

she had the courage to embark on an actual affair. No amount of circumspection could prevent its discovery. Yet why not? she thought, watching John tilt his head back to gulp down his liqueur. They could move away. George would give her a divorce. He was a gentleman. She'd marry Anson and they would live happily ever after.

"What's this rumour I hear about you trying to get up a ladies golf team to challenge the other mines?" Barbara asked, her tiny glass of Cointreau suddenly glittering ice-blue as she turned it in her fingers.

"I was," Daphne shrugged. "But I suppose now we'll have to wait until all this fuss with the Africans dies down."

"Somehow, I always imagined you preferred mixed games?"

"Oh, I do—I do." Daphne smiled at Barbara's look of disappointment because her remark passed unnoticed by the men. They were talking about the possibility of a strike again.

"I wish I wasn't such a duffer."

"Why don't you get Anson to take you round a few times? He's a jolly good teacher."

"Hard to keep my mind on golf if I did."

Daphne looked at her curiously. For some reason it had only recently occurred to her that Barbara found Anson as attractive as she did. And now she came to think of it, she'd seen Betty Thornton looking hungrily at him every now and then. Did they, too, she wondered, lie in bed with their husbands, trying to imagine it was Anson making love to them. Almost impossible with George. There wasn't time.

"We're going to be later than ever getting to the club," Barbara remarked in a bored voice.

"What's the hurry? Same old drunks trampling on us."

How petty and futile it all was, she reflected. Her drab marriage; spiteful parrying with a woman too old to matter. Yet how easily it could all be changed. Why hadn't she let Anson make love to her in the car last Saturday night? There were any number of places where they could have parked for half an hour without any danger of being seen. She smiled as she finished her coffee and watched Barbara walk across the lounge to the bedroom to powder her nose before they left for the club. Her room-mate's flushed, pretty face came back to her so clearly all at once. She had returned to the Nissan hut very late one night, flung herself on the bed and thrown her legs up in the air.

"Well, we finally did it tonight and, oh, it was so...so super. We're

engaged. We're going to get married as soon as we can and do it for hours and days and months...."

"Where did you go?"

"Nowhere. We did it in the car."

"In the car! But he's only got a tiny little Morris Minor, hasn't he?"

"Doesn't matter if you know how." The girl looked at her with a sort of sly, inward delight. She was bubbling over with the vividness of her emancipation, determined to keep the experience alive as long as possible by talking about it. "Do you want me to tell you how?" she asked, her face glowing with such happiness that Daphne felt a twinge of passionate envy.

"It's pretty obvious you're going to anyway," she replied, trying to conceal her jealousy.

The girl told her in a breathless rush of unfamiliar, sometimes startlingly coarse words. "Trouble was," she giggled finally, "my head kept on bumping the roof. And when...well, it happened to us both at once, and I nearly went through it."

Daphne stood up abruptly as Barbara came out of the bedroom. Why had nothing like that ever happened to her? Even in the three months she had been engaged to Richard, before he'd gone off on his convoy and been blown up, they had never done anything more than kiss each other. He was always—he seemed almost afraid of her. Treated her as some sort of precious discovery, too fragile for physical love. On their last evening together he finally did touch her breasts, only to pull his hand away, embarrassed and apologetic, callow murmurs about not wanting to spoil things...about waiting until they were married.

Rubbing her lips together to smooth the lipstick, Daphne inspected herself in the mirror. What was it about her that made men behave as though she were sacred? She had encouraged some of them almost to the point of humiliation, but still they hung back, soulful and ridiculous, leaving her to dream of that fiery explosion of ecstasy the novelists were so fond of describing. Except for George, of course, who treated her as something to be used once a week like a—like a bloody tennis racket. She couldn't stand it much longer, in the heat, with nothing to do all day. She never seemed to think of anything else, these days. Even looking at Somu conjured up visions so explicit they scared her. The long afternoons, when she tried to sleep for an hour or two, were an agony now. Headmistress swimming into view, hockey stick clattering between the chairs. "Sit still and pay attention." Grey hair brushed back

like a man, doomsday voice warning that people who did that invariably went mad, the ripple of Somu's shoulder muscles in the singlet he wore when George wasn't around, giggling dormitory jokes about candles, Anson's firm lithe body when he danced with her, skin sweat-slick in the afternoon of lonely desire.

Running a comb through her hair, she smiled suddenly, knowing she was going to make love to Anson sooner or later. The scandal would flare up for a while, then fade away in the general upheaval that was bound to occur before long. They would make love, impetuous, reckless love—and if it ended in a divorce, Anson would have to marry her. He would marry her and they would do it for hours and days and months...and live happily ever after.

Daphne turned away from the mirror as a car drew up noisily in front of the bungalow. She put the comb down and walked back into the lounge as Somu opened the screen door to let Vickers in. He looked harrassed as usual, apologetic yet angry at the same time, as he addressed her.

"I say, awfully sorry to barge in like this, but I need your husband for an hour or so. Bit of a palaver down in the compound. Chard's there now, but we need somebody from the mine."

"Where's Arthur?" George inquired.

"He's in his bungalow, but he's not feeling too chipper...."

"Nothing serious, is it?" George looked concerned. It had only recently become known that Arthur's failure to attend social functions had nothing to do with saving money for his retirement. He had begun to drink very heavily, and alone, at the weekends, and Reggie was worried about it because Arthur had a mild heart condition.

"No, no," Vickers said impatiently. "He's just not feeling quite up to scratch tonight."

"Well, in that case...." George turned to Daphne. "You won't mind if John drives you up to the club, will you my dear? I'll join you there as soon as I can."

"Of course not." Looking at her husband, Daphne saw the gleam of satisfaction in his eye. This was all he wanted out of life: the assurance that he was the strong man everyone had to turn to whenever there was any trouble. He was always in control, never drunk or ill or incapable, so pre-occupied with his superiority he treated everyone as objects. She, his wife, was simply an object, to be handed over to someone else to play with while he attended to the serious problems of existence. Her resentment flared up at

the expression of complacent self-confidence on his face. What a fool he was. And how quickly he was going to discover that she was anything but an object.

"What's the palaver about this time?" George asked.

"Haven't found out yet. Probably take us half the night to sort 'em out. They're on the verge of another riot about something."

George thought for a moment, then turned to Daphne again. "You'll be all right if I don't manage to get up to the club, won't you? This may take a while. Leave the car there and get somebody to drive you home--we can pick it up in the morning."

Daphne nodded, hoping the quick flicker of excitement she felt didn't show in her face. Anson could drive her home again. "Stop fussing about me," she said. "You'd better get down there before they get out of hand. I'll expect you when I see you."

George left with Vickers and Daphne stood gazing at the door for a moment, listening to the car start up and drive away.

"He'll be all right," Wally said, reassuringly.

"Hm? Oh yes, I'm sure he will."

"Might as well potter along to the dance then, if you're ready?" John suggested.

"Yes, let's. But I've got to spend a penny before we go. Won't be a sec."

She zipped up the bag, put it back in the medicine cabinet above the washbasin and straightened her dress as she looked at herself in the mirror. Her cheeks were a little flushed, but not enough to need any more powder, she decided.

As soon as they walked into the lounge she saw Anson. He was standing at the bar, talking to the new surveyor who had arrived on Wednesday. For a brief and frightening moment she saw how like George he was from the back. The square shoulders, the air of self-control--it was just how George must have looked twenty years ago. But then Anson turned, saw her, and his face lit up so unmistakably she felt a rush of happiness.

Anson waited nearly quarter of an hour before he came to ask her for a dance. "Hallo sweetie, I thought you were going to cut me dead tonight," she said, following him out onto the floor.

"Where's--where's George?" he asked. He looked awkward and uncertain of himself.

"Down in the compound, bearing our burden. He wants you to drive me

home again."

Anson glanced at her quickly to see if she was joking. "No need to look so alarmed," she smiled. "I can always get the Mannings to take me home."

"Don't worry, I'll drive you home all right. But you'd better have your hatpin ready tonight."

"All talk. You're really scared of women, aren't you?"

"Yes--especially women with husbands like George."

Daphne frowned irritably. "You are dancing badly tonight," she complained. "These are brand new shoes, too."

The music ended. Anson went across to the bar to fetch his drink and she sat fanning herself with a beer mat, wondering whether to tell him now or wait until they were in the car together. She stopped fanning suddenly and put the mat down carefully as George walked through the door and came across to their table.

"Blimey, that didn't take long. What happened?" Wally demanded.

"Don't know, really. Whole thing had more or less fizzled out by the time I got there."

Daphne smiled up at him. "How nice. Now we can have a dance together," she said brightly.

## CHAPTER 16

Anson turned to Tosa in disgust. His throat ached from shouting and he felt an almost irresistible temptation to punch the boss boy in the face.

"Can't you," he said furiously, "explain to these stupid black bastards that if we don't take samples there's no earthly point in drilling?"

"Massa?" Tosa studied his face anxiously.

"You no fit tellum if we no catch sample, we no go drill?"

"Massa, they no savvy. Be stupid bush boy."

"Jesus, tell me something I don't know. All time palaver, palaver. They go humbug me too much." Anson bunched his fist. "So help me, one day I'm going to let one of them have it. Make you go fetchum Mr. Gilby."

He wiped the sweat off his face wearily and sat down on his hard hat. He felt certain he would end up killing somebody if the situation didn't improve soon. For three weeks now the strike had been more or less imminent; but day after day there were postponements. The Africans decided they were going to need one more week's pay to keep them going, or the company hinted at some concession which prolonged negotiations. And in the meantime, Anson had to put up with the constant bickering to get his job done. He was sick to death of the jibes and sneers hurled at him in a language he didn't understand every time he went underground. If only the strike would begin, something was bound to come of it; there must be some sort of resolution.

But it had become obvious that neither the management nor the union wanted an actual confrontation. George had explained to him the problems of cheap labour and mechanization, and he knew now that it was going to drag on and on. Dawson, the General Manager from the London office, and Sir Miles Snelling, the Managing Director, had visited the mine two weeks ago. Anson was thoroughly disconcerted to see how insignificant Dawson seemed out here. He was bland and pasty-faced, obviously irritated that he had to come out to the Coast, which he clearly regarded as the responsibility of lesser men. But Anson was particularly dismayed one evening in the club when he found himself sitting next to Dawson. During a lull in the conversation the beat of drums



from the compound and the dull roar of cheering Africans suddenly swelled and died away.

"What's that?" Dawson demanded.

"What's what?" Anson had become so accustomed to the noise during the past few weeks he hadn't noticed it.

"The drums and the—the yelling. They starting a riot or something?"

Anson looked at Dawson's face and saw that it was even whiter than usual. He was frightened, thought Anson in disgust. "Oh, that's been going on for some time now," he said indifferently. "They drink palm wine and have nationalist meetings and whip themselves up. One of these nights they'll probably get drunk enough to come up and clean us out."

The noise swelled again in the warm night. There was something ominous and elemental about it and Anson himself often suffered a quick stab of apprehension when he heard it.

"Don't the police do anything about it?" Dawson asked angrily. "Damned dangerous letting them get worked up like this."

"What do you suggest, sir? Chard's got fourteen constables in his detachment, and there are more than two thousand Africans in that compound."

"Shouldn't be allowed. Have to see what we can do about it," Dawson grumbled, ordering another drink. "You fellows have obviously been much too lenient with them in the past."

Anson kept his eyes down on the table to conceal his resentment. And the next morning Dawson and Sir Miles suddenly announced that circumstances made it necessary for them to return to London at once. The shabbiness of their behaviour left him more than ever disillusioned and wanting to get away. It was they who really benefitted from the mine, who enjoyed all the luxuries of civilization, yet when it came down to it they had neither courage nor presence. George was worth a dozen of them rolled into one. Even Bill Gilby, a scruffy little ex-coalminer from Nottingham, was more admirable. Anson had met him in Kartwa, the little town some four miles along the road to Takoradi on Thursday, when the riot occurred. There had been no warning of trouble and, as far as anyone could discover, no actual reason for the riot. It just happened. Anson met Bill in one of the Indian stores and walked down the road to the UAC with him. Just as they turned the corner of the building, they heard shouts and the sudden crash and tinkle of broken glass. Africans all about them broke into a run, converging mindlessly on the noise, and they stopped with their backs to a brick wall, feeling, on Anson's part at any rate, a little scared as the uproar

along the road increased.

There was very little to be seen from where they stood, but the shouts and cries swelled into an ominous chant and the noise of windows breaking mingled with numerous unidentifiable crashes. The crowds swirled past them, and then suddenly seemed to eddy into a little pocket which surrounded them. All at once they found themselves faced by a semi-circle of Africans. They were nearly all mammies, some old, some still in their teens. Their eyes were wide with excitement—a sort of sexual excitement, it occurred to Anson at the time, and a little stab of fear gripped him as he remembered stories he'd heard from people who had flown on the North-West Frontier in India before the war: stories of pilots who were forced down for one reason or another and handed over to the Afghan women to be tortured. A sense of unreality came over him as the mammies crowded round them, screaming at them and threatening them with hands which had turned into claws. One of them got a grip on Anson's shirt collar and was beginning to tear at it with all her strength when Bill Gilby suddenly let out a roar and pointed to a big, flabby woman whom Anson recognised vaguely.

"Mary Wangara," said Bill, beaming with pleasure. "Me savvy what you want. You want I go jig-jig with you?" He made to undo his fly buttons and some of the women, who had quietened down at his first bellow, began to giggle. Mary Wangara, Anson recalled, was the procuress of the neighbourhood. No native girl was allowed to consort with a European unless she got her cut. It was said she knew the personal idiosyncracies, as well as the actual measurements, of every white man in the area. She let out a fat chuckle.

"Aieeee! Massa Bill, you no be fit. Old man too much. You be..." She held up a drooping forefinger and began to laugh.

"Eh! Who me?" Bill shook his head with an expression of exaggerated outrage on his face and held his arm up in a familiar gesture of potency. "Here," he said, stepping forward and running his hand suddenly up under her mammy cloth. "Let's 'ave a feel."

Mary Wangara doubled up to get away from his hand and let out a squawk of simulated dismay. The crowd burst into shrieks of laughter and appreciation. In a flash they were transformed from ugly savages into happy, laughing children, and almost at once some of them began to peel off from the little clot gathered round Anson and Bill, swirling away to join the crowds milling about in front of the UAC, smashing and looting in earnest now. Looking along the road, Anson could see smoke billowing up and hear the crackle of flames. For a moment he

was seized by a curiously powerful urge to join them. He too wanted to smash and destroy. He blinked in surprise, then turned to see Peter Chard driving towards them slowly through the crowds in a jeep.

"Come on, jump in," Chard shouted cheerfully. "I'll drop you off at the station and come back. You don't happen to know how many Europeans there were in the UAC when this started, do you?" he asked, as they clambered in beside him.

"No, we never got to it."

"Lucky for you. But I think they all got away through the back of the store."

"What's it all about?"

"God knows. Spontaneous combustion, or something. We've been expecting a bust up for some time. Poor old Indian storekeepers are ones who'll suffer. Two of 'em have been killed already."

Chard had been right. The riot lasted three or four hours, and when it was over, three Indian families had been wiped out and half a dozen Africans were dead; but the Europeans in town at the time suffered nothing more than insults and a little pushing around. There was neither purpose nor reason to the outburst, but it created an atmosphere of tension and potential violence, and several of the Europeans began to talk of sending their wives home. Anson shifted on his hard hat and looked up as lights came towards him along the development drive. He recognised Bill Gilby's bouncy walk.

"Wotcher, Bill," he greeted him. "Look, you got us out of the shit in Kartwa the other day—show me how to handle these black bastards of yours. Every time I bring a sample crew in here, there's a bloody great uproar. It's driving me round the bend. That boss boy of yours stands waving his flaming finger in my face and shouting at me. If he doesn't smarten up, I'm going to let him have it one of these days."

"Who, Khonaka, you mean?"

"I don't know what his frigging name is. That one over there."

Bill turned round and shone his lamp on the boss boy's face. "What's the palaver?" he demanded.

The boss boy immediately began to harangue him, waving his finger in Bill's face just as he had done to Anson. Bill's right hand shot up suddenly and he grabbed the finger, bending it back so quickly the boy dropped to his knees with a gasp of pain. "You black prick, you do that again and I go breakum finger, savvy?" He gave the finger another twist and the boy shrieked. "Now

get up," he said, releasing his finger. Khonaka stood up, rubbing his hand.

"What for you go humbug this massa?"

"He go stop drill all time. No catch bonus atall."

"You stupid black fart!" Bill stepped forward and pointed his light into one of the boss boy's ears while he held his hand open on the other side. The sample crew, squatting along the side of the drive, began to giggle.

"Yeah," Bill nodded. "Light go right through. I seeum. No be any brains for inside."

"Ah, massa!" The boss boy stepped away from him angrily. "No be so."

"Yo, be so. Listen, you go catchum mammy for jig-jig, what you go do first? Ah-ha, first you go look her for here proper." Bill gestured to his groin. "Then if she be fit, you go catchum your jackhammer and jig-jig. No be so?"

Delighted by the analogy, the sample crew burst out laughing, and even Khonaka's sullen face broke into a reluctant grin. "All same for gold," Bill went on, nodding seriously. "Number one, you go look--catchum sample. Then, if sample be fit, you go jig-jig mammy rock with jackhammer. No be so?"

By now the sample crew was convulsed with laughter. They were slapping each other on the shoulder and crowing with pleasure. Bill turned to them. "All right, go on, get up there and catch sample one time," he commanded, gesturing towards the raise which led to the stope above with his lamp. They scrambled to their feet, still chuckling gleefully, and he took off his hard hat and sat down beside Anson.

"See what makes 'em tick?" he grunted, shuffling about on his hat until he was comfortable. "It's cunt. That's all they ever think about. You relate everything to snatch and you gottem."

Anson laughed. Bill Gilby had a large wooden board in his room with little tufts of hair stuck to it. He claimed they were samples of pubic hair taken from women of twenty-three different nationalities--all of whom he had seduced, of course. Legend had it he was always the first one to reach the brothels when the boat docked in Las Palmas, scissors in hand, eagerly searching for new trophies.

"I know," Anson agreed. "But it doesn't seem to work for me any more. They won't listen now."

"It used to though, eh--when you first arrived? You were the wonder boy. Everyone was talking about how you could wrap 'em round your little finger. Ever try to work out why it changed?"

"Of course I have. And it's obvious--all this independence bullshit."

"It's more than that, mate--much more. Pemberton can still handle 'em. So can Hampton...and so c'n I. And you know why, eh?"

"No. You tell me."

"Piece of piss. Y'see, I savvy some of the lingo of these bogeys now, 'n I've heard 'em yapping about you. They think there's something wrong with you. You been here nearly a year and you ain't screwed anything."

"Oh, for crying out loud--what's that got to do with it?"

"Plenty too much. They reckon a bloke who don't poke at least once a week must have something pretty bloody serious wrong with him."

Anson laughed angrily. "They would--bunch of animals."

"Don't gimme that. We spend nearly all our time thinking about it, too. Only we ain't so honest. And you're a right one to talk--what're you hanging round George's wife for? Because you like talking to her? Bullshit! You're after her little box of licorice allsorts...."

"Good Christ! Isn't there any decency...."

"Listen sonny, you asked for me advice and I give it you. Grab yourself a nice little mammy and screw her three or four times the first night. You're still young enough to make 'er come every time. Then boot her arse out and let 'er go down to the village and boast about it, an' you'll be a big shot with the bogeys again."

Bill stood up, called to Tosa and walked a few yards down the drive with him. He stood talking to him for a few seconds, his hand on his shoulder. Anson could see Tosa nodding his head, then Bill turned away.

"See you," he said, and bounced off along the drive, whistling cheerily to himself.

Anson looked at Tosa, longing to ask him what they had been talking about and filled with an angry resentment. He was being treated like a handicapped child. The servants were being advised about how to look after him. Tosa sat down again, avoiding his eye, and Anson sighed. Everything was closing in on him, he felt--narrowing down to slimy, primeval origins. No wonder they were black. Black was the only appropriate colour for this ugly, fetid little backwater. For the first time in his life he experienced a cold stab of anxiety about his virility. Everybody, in one way or another had hinted at it, now he came to think of it. Even Daphne. "You're really afraid of women, aren't you?" But even before that, when he had taken her home in the car. "Why don't you try it? It might be yummy." He remembered with terrible

clarity the speculative look in her eyes as she gazed at him in the moonlight, and shuddered as it occurred to him that the look might have an entirely different significance to the one he had given it. What gross, contemptuous little thoughts had been lurking behind that lovely face all this time?

Anson looked at Tosa again and wondered what he was thinking about. Tosa had treated him with a respect bordering on devotion for the past three weeks. A day or two after he was rescued from the old workings, Anson suddenly remembered Tosa's request to borrow money so that he could get married. He gave him fifteen pounds, wondering at the time whether it amounted to conscience money. The following evening Tosa appeared at the bungalow with his new bride, a slender, rather appealing young creature, who looked up at him with surprisingly bold eyes. They stood in front of him, holding hands, and for one startled moment Anson felt convinced Tosa was about to offer him seigniorial rights. But Tosa hadn't; he was merely making a gesture of pride and gratitude and Anson was touched. There was an atmosphere of such simple and uncomplicated sexuality that Anson experienced a strong pang of envy, too.

He stood up suddenly and walked away without even his customary grunt to Tosa. He'd got to get out. Like a bloody fool he had hung back again when he saw the Old Man yesterday. Arthur Hutchinson had sent for him to ask him if he thought there was any hope of reviving the Association. Anson explained what had happened for the second time—he had been to see him on the night of the meeting to warn him about the dues. Arthur's expression was difficult to decipher.

"Disappointing," he said. "I was hoping you could hold them together. Gives 'em an illusion of authority and sort of channels their energies away from the strike palaver."

Anson found it hard not to lose his temper. He felt he'd handled the meeting with considerable skill. "I'm very sorry, sir. But in the circumstances, I don't know what else one could do. If they all decide they're not going to vote on something, you can't very well force them to...."

"No, no—I realize that. And please don't mistake me. I'm very grateful to you for taking on such a thankless job in the first place. But don't you think there's a chance...some chance of getting them going again when they realize they can't transfer the funds to the United Convention?"

"I doubt it. We're having another committee meeting on Monday. But in the meantime, they were supposed to be having a general meeting...."

"Yes, you told me, and I asked Vickers to send one of his boys along

as an observer. Apparently there were only about twenty people there and it disintegrated into a shouting match."

"Well, in that case, of course, I'll see what I can do. But if they bring this Kwotze bloke along again, I don't think that'll be much. The committee are all afraid of losing face in front of him."

"I'll see if I can't arrange for him to be otherwise engaged on Monday night. Just at the moment, in this--well, this rather explosive situation, I think we've got to be very firm with them. Don't be afraid to bully them a little."

Anson smiled. "I was afraid I'd been too dictatorial already."

"Yes, I know what you mean. It's a difficult time for all of us. But I've had it suggested to me that you're inclined to sympathise with their desires. The more I think about it, the more convinced I am that if we let 'em get out of hand, they're going to suffer just as much as we are in the long run."

Anson was tempted to argue with him. Instead, he grinned suddenly. "Right at the moment my sympathies are at a low ebb. I'll see if I can't hammer these so-called committee members into shape on Monday."

"That's the stuff." Arthur reached for the telephone. "Don't forget to drop in and let me know how it goes."

Anson left the office vaguely concerned about how ill the Old Man looked, but admiring his tact. Without being in any way offensive, he had conveyed the impression that Anson, as a European, was in danger of letting the side down. As he left the shaft and walked past the timekeeper's office, he saw Dunkwah at one of the windows and walked over to remind him about the meeting on Monday evening. Dunkwah sulkily confirmed that he would be there and that he would remind the others. Anson drove back to his bungalow in the company lorry, bathed and eat his lunch, feeling a little more cheerful but still dismayed by the conversation with Bill Gilby. What upset him was that Bill was probably right: the obvious answer would be to get hold of a mammy this weekend. After all, everyone else was doing it. The wives knew, too, and although they pretended to disapprove, Anson had a shrewd suspicion they were in some way excited by the knowledge. He had heard snatches of conversation and seen looks of something oddly akin to lust bestowed on newcomers who were known to have slept with a native girl for the first time. If only he could overcome the curious reluctance he felt, all sorts of problems might be solved.

After work that afternoon he went down to cricket practice in the nets

and bowled for nearly two hours with a ferocity that caused several bruises and some angry words. He returned to his mess, had a bath and drank the last two beers in the fridge before he sat down to listen to Henry clearing his throat all through supper. He was restless and irritable when he went back to his room afterwards. There were at least two letters which ought to be written, but he knew he could never settle down to them in his present mood, and in the end he managed to lose himself in the book he had begun the night before. The doctor had lent it to him. It was by Nigel Balchin, an author he'd never heard of: a story of petty rivalries in a scientific research establishment during the war which he found strangely reassuring. By ten o'clock he had finished it and sat for a while gazing through his window at the lights on the shaft across the valley. The hero of the novel was a bomb disposal expert; he risked his life on a number of occasions defusing potentially lethal land mines and unexploded bombs, while preserving his integrity in the face of the corruption and deviousness of his colleagues. But it was all too simple and uncomplicated, he decided. Right and wrong were too easy to perceive and there was nothing in the nature of genuine moral dilemma. To hell with moral dilemmas; he needed another drink before he went to bed. He got up and took the bottle of sherry out of his drawer. Anson had discovered that sherry and Klim made a good drink if you mixed it carefully so that the milk didn't curdle. The trick was to mix the Klim and the sherry with warm water, then put ice in to cool it.

Taking his glass beer mug, he walked round the side of the mess to the kitchen. The servants were asleep. He could hear them snoring in the little huts behind the cook house. The wood stove had gone out, but the water in a kettle on top of it was still warm and he filled the mug, got some ice from the fridge, and went back to his room. He had to wait for several minutes until the ice melted and cooled the drink. It tasted soft and velvety. Syllabub, he thought, licking his lips in satisfaction—or mead. The murmur of bees invaded his room. He cocked his head and listened. No, not bees; the steady hum of the mill had suddenly changed pitch. The light on the ceiling flickered and he smiled to himself as he visualized the panic in the power station, where everyone would be dashing about trying to reduce loads and push breakers back in. They were still waiting for the new diesel turbine which had been ordered when the war ended. The light faded until there was only a dull red glow from the filament, then flared up again until it shone normally. A moment or two later the noise from the mill grew louder and Anson



felt an illogical disappointment because everything hadn't ground to a standstill.

He took another long pull at his drink, then looked at the door in surprise as he heard what sounded like a knock. A shadow on the screen made him catch his breath.

"Who's there?" he demanded sharply.

The door opened very gently and the girl slipped into the room to stand beside it with her hands pressed against the wall, looking down at her feet. Anson experienced a fierce stab of anger. So that was what Bill had been talking to Tosa about, the bloody little pimp.

"Who sent you?" he said, banging his drink down on the arm of the chair so hard that he spilled some of it.

"Massa?"

"Who tell you go come for this place--Tosa?"

"Yo massa."

"Well, you can get out--beat it!"

The girl looked up at him nervously, and all at once Anson felt sorry for her. She was young and scared and it was no fault of hers that she had been sent to him. She was nice, too, a pretty little thing--one had to give Tosa credit for his taste. He drank some more sherry and wondered if Henry'd heard their voices. "All right," he smiled, beckoning for her to move toward him. "Now that you're here, let's have a look at you." She came forward hesitantly and stood beside his chair. "Take it off," he nodded, tugging at her mammy cloth. He caught a gleam of white teeth as the girl smiled back at him and unwound the cloth in a quick, graceful swirl before dropping it to the floor. Looking at her, Anson saw that she was quivering slightly, yet there was a suggestion of pride in the way she stood. His heart began to thump so loudly he felt sure the girl must be able to hear it.

"What's your name?" he asked quietly.

"Yumu, massa."

"You be clean, Yumu?"

"Yo massa. Plenty too much. I go catch bath small-small."

She was still wearing a bright yellow G-string. Anson hooked his finger round it. "Take this off too," he said, and the girl promptly rolled it over her thighs and let it drop to her ankles. He reached forward and slid his hand between her legs. She made a slight sound in her throat and moved at once to accommodate him. She was unbelievably soft and silky and desire surged

through Anson's body. He looked up at her face. She was smiling down at him, a gentle, faintly quizzical smile. He had never experienced such a feeling of peace before. He felt he could sit for ever, gently caressing her and watching her face. All the gritty frustrations of the past few months fell away from him. What a stupid, inconsequential bloody fool he had been to wait so long.

He withdrew his hand and stood up, touching her on the breast. "Go for bed," he said, and began to undo his shirt as he walked across the room to the light switch. But when he turned to measure the distance back to the bed before turning it off, he paused suddenly. The girl was lying, her arms flat beside her. Unfortunately, her feet were towards Anson. They were her worst feature, big and calloused, with soles so pink they were somehow obscene. Supposing she wasn't clean and he caught something? The humiliation would be intolerable. But he couldn't stop now. It would be all over the village that he really was impotent. Anson decided he had to go out and relieve himself first. "Wait small," he told the girl and left the room.

As he was walking back along the side of the bungalow he heard the phone ring. He knew at once it was Daphne; she had taken to phoning him more and more often in the evenings. Anson tried to discourage her because the phone was in their lounge and he felt sure Henry and Charles were always straining their ears to hear what was being said. But Daphne had laughed at him. She seemed determined to precipitate some sort of scandal. Anson hurried back through his room into the lounge, closing the door behind him carefully.

"Hallo," he said curtly. "Payne here."

"Hallo, sweetie. Did I wake you up?"

"No, I was—I was reading. What's up?"

"Want to hear some good news?"

"I—yes, of course."

"We had Arthur Hutchinson round for dinner. He's been on the phone, talking to government bods in Accra today, and one of them told him you've been picked to play for the colony. If there isn't any trouble before then, the Nigerian cricket team's coming to Accra for a match in three weeks."

Anson leaned against the wall, scratching his chest and feeling ridiculously pleased with himself. He hadn't even known he was in the running.

"Are you still there?" Daphne asked.

"Yes. Yes I was--it was nice of you to phone."

"I was so excited, and I wanted to be the first to tell you."

"Why should you be excited?"

"Stop fishing. You know jolly well why."

Happy and confused, Anson stood gazing at the framed photograph on the wall opposite him. It was a photograph of the occupants of the mess, taken more than thirty years ago. They stood, formal and self-conscious, their faces lost in the shadows of the huge topees they were wearing.

"Daphne," he said.

"Yes?"

"Oh, nothing."

"What's the matter? You sound funny tonight--too much to drink?"

"No. Two beers and a sherry."

"Sherry? You'll be getting a liver. We'll have to celebrate tomorrow. I'll make George buy some champagne and we'll drink black velvets...because I haven't finished yet--there's more good news."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Arthur's got to be down in Accra at the same time for a meeting of the general managers of all the mines--and because George is obviously going to take over from him when he leaves next month, he's asked George to go with him. So I'll be able to come and watch you while they're having their meetings."

"I'll probably score at least two ducks and drop catches all over the place if you do."

"Rubbish. You'll score at least two centuries and everybody'll be talking about you."

"Fat chance. Daphne, I...you know we can't...."

"I must dash now, sweetie. Arthur's still here. He and George are out on the verandah. I told them I was going to spend a penny and they'll think I've fallen in or something. Don't forget to sound surprised when Arthur tells you tomorrow."

"Well, thanks for phoning. You've...." Anson burst out laughing. "You've spoilt my night."

"What on earth's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing. I'll tell you sometime. Or perhaps I won't. See you tomorrow for tennis--half-past four."

Anson put the phone down and looked at the door of his room. He felt

reluctant to go back in, embarrassed at the prospect of sending the girl away. He wondered if it would hurt her feelings, then laughed at himself. She was only interested in the money. When he opened the door, she hadn't moved. She was still lying with her arms beside her, looking up at him uncertainly.

"Make you go now," he said, gesturing to the door and walking across to the dresser for some change.

"Other massa go come? I wait for him go?"

"No."

She looked at him anxiously. "Massa, I no be fit?"

Anson frowned as he took two half crowns from the pile of change in the drawer and turned. "You fit plenty too much," he smiled, picking up her mammy cloth and holding it out to her. "Me no good."

The girl swung her legs to the floor and looked at him disbelievingly. "We go fixum, massa. I makum strong. I savvy topside palaver plenty."

Anson found himself blushing as he shook his head again. "You wouldn't understand," he said. "Somebody just turned the switch off."

"Massa?"

"Make you go."

She hesitated for a moment longer, then stood up, slipped on her G-string and wound the cloth over her shoulder and round her waist. "Make I come tomorrow?" she asked, looking so eager Anson was convinced for a moment she was more interested in him than in the money.

He took her hand and put the two half crowns in it. "Maybe. I go tell Tosa, huh?"

"Yo massa."

She looked at him wistfully for a few seconds, then slipped through the screen door, closed it gently behind her and vanished down the steps with a faint rustle of her mammy cloth.

## CHAPTER 17

Anson sat on the platform at the top of the raise with his feet dangling over the ore-pass, watching the sample crew work. They worked in pairs, one cutting a furrow at right angles to the reef with hammer and moil, the other catching the chips in a bowl. They struck up a sort of rhythm, the boy at the top of the stope hitting his moil first with a crooning grunt, then the others followed suit in quick succession. The drill crew squatted behind him, chattering tirelessly. They always did, and Anson wondered what they found to talk about all the time. One often saw a group of three or four Europeans, sitting silently as they rested before climbing to a higher level, or waited, perhaps, for a skip to take them to the surface, but never silent Africans. They kept bursting into laughter and Anson felt sure they were discussing him. Probably they knew about the girl who had come to his room and were convinced by now that he was impotent.

The steady rhythm of hammer and moil made him sleepy. He looked up the face of the stope again and all at once he was struck by the utter absurdity of the whole thing. So much work, so much labour and sweat and strife to remove flecks of useless metal from the rock so that they could be transported halfway across the world and buried underground again in the capacious vaults of Fort Knox. He had been down to the mill to watch the gold being smelted for the first time a few weeks ago. It was done once a month and he looked at the results almost incredulously. More than two thousand people had toiled away with huge masses of machinery and the result was four little bars of gold; four bars about the size of a common brick, except that they were longer. Yet in spite of this, he experienced an odd sort of excitement when Wally Manning and Tom Kinsella, the senior shiftboss in the mill, opened the doors of the furnace and pulled out the retort. Wearing asbestos gloves, they lifted it in a special clamp with a handle on either side and he watched them pour the molten gold into the forms. There was something symbolic and curiously satisfying about the scene; and when he handled the bars afterwards, the reddish-yellow gleam was as impressive as everyone said it would be. It was an odd

sensation to know that the bar he was holding in his hands represented more than thirty years of his present salary.

Anson looked round as somebody came up the ladderway from the drive. It was Thomas Khona, one of the two Africans who had been promoted to shift-boss on the mine.

"Morning Thomas," he greeted him. "My congratulations. This is the first section I've been in this month where we haven't had a bloody great argument before we can start sampling."

"Not having palaver here, sah. My section, they savvy too much."

"So it seems--and you've got the best tonnage this month. I make it a seventeen foot advance."

Thomas looked out across the stope and wiped the sweat off his face. "You think African shiftboss not fit to look for section proper?"

Anson smiled. "Nothing of the sort--I didn't mean that at all. All the other sections are way down on production this month because everyone's so busy nattering about the strike palaver. What's the score--we going to have a strike or not?"

"Maybe we go strike tomorrow."

"That's what you've been saying for the last three months."

"Today is difference. Company meeting with union now. We savvy when we go for topside."

"And what happens to you, then--if there is a strike? You're a salaried official."

"I go strike too. This is for all my peoples."

Anson scratched his leg and frowned. That was half the trouble. They couldn't really make up their minds just what they wanted to strike about--independence, more money, or simply a refreshing break in the monotony of work.

"Tell me," he asked curiously, "do you really think you Africans can take over this mine and run it all by yourselves?"

"Will be doing," Thomas replied confidently. "We savvy."

There was no point in trying to argue with them, Anson reflected. They really did believe they could--even Thomas, who was a bright and capable boy with a mission school education. Yet it was only three or four years since Kelsey, the Australian shiftboss, had left. Kelsey had a glass eye, and for years he convinced the Africans that the eye functioned whether he was wearing it or not. He had been in the habit of taking it out, putting it where it could be seen in a stope, then retiring to some quiet cross-cut to sleep for

the rest of the shift, knowing that the Africans would work just as hard as if he'd stayed in the stope because they were convinced the eye was still watching them. Thomas, Anson knew, had believed this too.

"I suppose you'll be in line for General Manager, then—since you're a shiftboss now?"

"Massa go laugh. Small-small, you no go laugh."

"They ever teach you the one about 'he who laughs last' when you were at school?"

"Massa?"

Anson shook his head and scrambled to his feet as the sample crew began to make their way back along the footwall to the platform. As a rule, he looked forward to weekends, but this one had been ruined for him when Henry, with an unmistakable gleam of satisfaction in his eye, walked over to him just before he came underground and told him the Obuassi team had cancelled their visit because of the strike business. It seemed futile to hope that the match in Accra wouldn't be cancelled too.

He went into the office to see if there was any news about the meeting before going back to his mess for lunch. The meeting was still in progress. As Anson walked out onto the verandah at the back of the building he could see them through Arthur's window. Kwotze was sitting on a chair on the verandah. "Morning," Anson greeted him. He looked up sullenly, then looked away again without replying. Anson shrugged and walked across to the lorry.

Henry and Charles were already eating when Anson came in from his bath. He sat down at the table with nothing but a towel wrapped round his loins, a habit Charles disapproved of because he thought it looked bad in front of the servants. The cold pork was horribly greasy, the salad soggy and tasteless. Anson picked at it listlessly.

"What was all the noise about last night?" Henry asked. "Phone calls in the middle of the night and doors banging...."

"We men of affairs are liable to be called to the phone at any time. I hope you managed to hear the whole conversation without too much difficulty?"

Henry cleared his throat and frowned. "Don't know why you have to keep everyone awake talking about cricket at midnight...."

"It wasn't midnight—it was about half-past ten. But I must say this, Henry, for a man of your age, you've got splendid ears."

"I suppose it was Pemberton's wife," said Charles, patting his lips fastidiously with his napkin.

"I don't think that's any of your damn business."

"Interesting, though. You had a girl in your room, too, didn't you?"

Anson looked at him for a moment, struggling to keep his temper.

Charles would make sure everyone knew about the girl as soon as possible. He laughed unpleasantly. "How's the ginger ale?" he inquired. "Or are you allowed to go back on the hard stuff this weekend?"

Charles flushed. He was obviously trying to think of a crushing retort. None came, and in the end he threw down his napkin and left the table. Anson chuckled deliberately, and then followed him, going into his room to lie down for half an hour before returning to the office.

When he got there, the meeting had only just broken up. Amanquah and Dunkwah were standing talking to Kwotze in muted tones. They studiously ignored him as he walked past them. Arthur was leaning against the wall in the corridor outside George's office, talking to him. Their faces, too, were grave. Good, thought Anson. It looked as though things had gone really badly this time. Perhaps now they would have a strike at last, and something definite would come of it.

"You look as if you're expecting the worst, sir?" he said to Arthur as he came up to them.

Arthur grimaced. "Well, I won't pretend it went very smoothly. We had to begin by chucking this damned bolshi Kwotze out. He's nothing to do with the union. Then the rest of them threatened to walk out too, if we did—so it turned into a showdown. I told 'em if they walked out the negotiations were finished and any strike they tried to call would be illegal...."

"Probably the best thing that could have happened," George broke in, soothingly. "They know now we're not going to make any more concessions—and they know we're not going to put up with any parasites from the United Convention coming here to make trouble."

"Could be...and I suppose we'll soon find out. They're bound to have another of their jamborees down in the village tonight. I'll have to warn Vickers and Chard. Let's go and grab a bite to eat," he said, turning to George. "I want to discuss the new development down by the ventilation shaft with you this afternoon. We can't go on putting it off for ever. Recovery was way down again this month."

They walked away and Anson was just about to go into his office when Arthur suddenly turned back. "Oh, by the way, Payne—all this fuss, I nearly forgot. Got some good news for you. I was talking to Endicott in the



Secretariat yesterday, and he told me you'd been picked to play cricket for the Colony against Nigeria in a couple of weeks."

"Me?" said Anson, hoping his air of astonishment looked more genuine than it felt.

"Yes. Congratulations. I hadn't realized you were becoming a star."

"But...but will I be able to have time off?"

"Oh, I think George may be persuaded that you're not utterly indispensable for a couple of days. Matter of fact, we'll probably be going down together. The managers of all the mines are meeting with the Governor's staff to see if we can't hammer out some sort of consistent policy to face these people with."

"Well, thank you sir. Thank you very much. Let's hope all this fuss blows over by then. I suppose you heard that Obuassi cancelled?"

"Yes I did. Disappointing for you. You'll be wanting all the practice you can get."

"Stupid thing to do," said George. "Should have come and shown 'em we're not bothered by their antics."

Bowls, while the Armada approaches, thought Anson, trying not to laugh. Reggie would like that. He went back into his office, took the dustcover off his calculating machine and settled down to work. It was a monotonous task, occupying very little of his mind. He had to add up all the assay values, then divide by the average width of the reef—extending this, eventually, to the average width of the orebody in the particular section of the mine. His fingers grew slippery with sweat, kept flipping off the little handle of the machine, forcing him to begin again, while in his imagination he cracked another ball effortlessly to the square-leg boundary and acknowledged the applause. At two o'clock he heard George come back to his office and at half-past, Amanquah asking him for time off to go and see the shaft clerk about some relative for whom he was trying to find a job.

Anson finished reducing the figures and sat looking at the results cynically. A little better than two and a half pennyweights. Arthur and George had better get cracking with their new development, he reflected, or the mine would shut down without the assistance of any strikes. He looked up as he became aware of an increasing commotion in the road outside the office building. He slid his chair back and walked across to the window. The road was full of miners. Instead of going back to the compound, they were milling about between the club and the offices, still wearing their boots and hard hats. As he

watched, another skip came to the surface and the crowd grew. Anson felt a little shiver of apprehension run down his back. There were so many of them and they appeared in an ugly mood. After hesitating for a few minutes, during which the crowd in the road grew larger and more noisy, he walked quickly up the corridor to George's office.

George was sitting at his desk, writing. He finished a sentence, read it through carefully, then looked up.

"What's all this in aid of?" Anson asked, jerking his head towards the noise outside.

"Just a little tantrum. They'll soon get tired of it and go home."

Anson saw that George was looking past him and turned to find Arthur standing in the doorway.

"You don't think we ought to send for the police, then?" Arthur asked George.

"Certainly not. They're hoping a little show of force'll rattle us. Best thing we can do is ignore 'em."

Arthur looked anxious and even paler than he had lately, thought Anson. He stood listening to the shouts and yells outside for a few seconds, then shrugged and turned reluctantly to walk back to his office. Anson went across to the window and looked out. Everyone was facing the shaft now. Pressing his head against the screen, he looked up the road. Kwotze, together with Amanquah and the rest of the union executives, was standing on something which raised them above the level of the crowd. He was obviously asking them rhetorical questions because they began to respond with shouts which grew louder with each one.

"I don't know," said Anson, turning to George again. "That's Kwotze whipping them up, and he's a pro. I think we're going to have trouble this time—real trouble."

George finished writing another sentence, blotted it carefully, and sat back in his chair. "Only if we show any signs of the white feather," he said, gazing at Anson steadily.

Anson dropped his eyes and began to move towards the door. A loud crash on the galvanized roof above his head made him jump. Then there were several more and a sudden metallic screech as a rock tore through the wire mesh screen on the window and thudded to the floor.

"Christ! What do we do now?" Anson demanded.

"Do?" said George, with a look of astonishment. "Go out and stop them,

of course. Come on."

Anson hesitated, seized by an urge to dive under the table, then followed George down the corridor and out onto the verandah in front of the building. His knees were shaky and he felt certain the colour had gone out of his face. A great roar went up from the crowd as they appeared.

"Look out!" Anson yelled, as a rock hurtled towards them. He ducked away from it, but George failed to see it and it struck him on the side of the head. He staggered briefly, then gripped the verandah rail and stood perfectly upright, looking down at the crowd with an expression of mild curiosity. Anson saw the deep cut running into his hairline on the side of his head. At first it seemed blue, then changed to pure white before the little drops of blood welled up and turned to a steady trickle flowing down his cheek. An abrupt silence fell on the Africans. They stood, their eyes as white as they always were when they had just come to the surface, gazing at George in a sort of guilty fascination.

"Well, what's the bloody palaver?" George asked calmly.

A murmur ran through them. There were a few half-hearted shouts, but nobody made any real attempt to reply.

"You no savvy this be stupid palaver?" George went on in his quiet, clear voice. "You go breakum mine, be plenty humbug for boys and for massas. You no catch moneys, no catch food...." George smiled suddenly and looked around at them. "Maybe you no catch jig-jig. Mammy no catch chop, they go sick for belly, no fit jig-jig!"

"Ho, massa!" A little ripple of laughter ran through the crowd. It was broken by the frenzied voice of Kwotze, who began to shout at the top of his voice and force his way through the crowd towards George. Anson realized in astonishment that they resented this interruption. They were pushing him back angrily, shouting what were obviously hostile remarks at him.

"Now you go on back to the compound," said George, raising his voice only slightly. He wiped the blood off his cheek and held his hand out to them. "This no be good. You no go catch more moneys for this palaver."

A murmur of assent ran through the crowd again, punctuated by a fierce altercation which broke out around Kwotze. The boys nearest the verandah looked shamefaced, as if they wanted to get away. Looking up the road, Anson saw that many of them had begun to leave already. George watched them for a moment, then took out his handkerchief to mop his face as he turned to walk back to his office. He paused at his door and looked along the corridor with a

puzzled expression.

"Where the devil did Arthur get to?" he grunted. "We'd better go and have a look."

Anson followed him automatically. Arthur wasn't in his office and Anson was about to turn away when George let out an exclamation and hurried round the desk. Stepping after him, Anson saw that Arthur had collapsed on the floor. His chair was pushed well back and he was lying curled up on his side. As he came towards him, Anson abruptly became aware of the noise of Arthur's breathing. He sounded as though he was choking.

"Phone Reggie and tell him to get down here right away," said George, kneeling down and turning Arthur gently over onto his back. "Looks like a heart attack."

Anson phoned the surgery, only to find that Reggie had gone back to his bungalow. It seemed hours before Betty answered the phone; but when she did, she responded at once without asking any unnecessary questions, and came back to the phone a minute or two later to say that Reggie was on his way.

Anson put the phone down and looked at Arthur. He turned away again quickly. Arthur's face was distorted on one side as though something were pulling it down towards his chest. But it was his breathing that upset Anson. The harsh, sucking noise made Anson want to stop it somehow; to cover his face and muffle it until it stopped. He heard a squeal of brakes as a vehicle drew up behind the building. Reggie had really got his finger out this time, he thought, feeling relieved as he walked across to look out of the window. But it wasn't Reggie; it was Peter Chard in his Jeep, followed by a lorry full of police.

"What's this I hear about you people trying to keep all the fun to yourselves?" he demanded, appearing at the door a moment or two later. He stopped abruptly and looked down at Arthur. "Blimey! What's happened?"

"Heart attack, I think," George replied. "Ah, that's better." Arthur's breathing gradually changed and the livid expression began to fade from his face. He looked all at once as if he had merely fallen asleep on the floor.

"But what was all the row about?" Chard insisted. "Cooper phoned and said you had a full scale riot on your hands."

"Cooper?" George looked amused. "I'm afraid he always was inclined to exaggerate a little."

Anson glanced at him quickly, surprised he hadn't noticed before how firmly Cooper had been shunted into the background. He was no longer even

consulted on routine decisions. He turned towards the window as he heard another vehicle draw up in the parking lot. This time it was the doctor. He hurried into the room, followed by two orderlies with a bottle of oxygen on a trolley.

"How long's he been out?" Reggie asked.

"Hard to say. Probably not more than twenty minutes."

"Has he been like this all the time—just unconscious?"

"No, his face was all twisted and he was having difficulty with his breathing."

Reggie adjusted the valves on the oxygen bottle and put the mask on Arthur's face, signalling to one of the orderlies to hold it in place. He took his pulse, then slipped on his stethoscope and began to sound his chest. After listening briefly, he frowned and turned to take a syringe and a small bottle of colourless liquid from his bag. He filled the syringe, squirted the air out of it and injected the liquid into Arthur's arm. He listened to his chest again for a little while, then took off the stethoscope and dropped it into the bag.

"All right," he said to the orderlies, "bring the stretcher and get him up to the hospital. Make sure you put him back on oxygen as soon as you get him into the ambulance."

"Well?" said George.

The doctor stood up and shook his head. "Too early to say yet. He's had a stroke all right—but I won't be able to tell how serious it was for a day or two." He fumbled at his breast pocket for his cigarettes. "I knew he had a cardiac problem and I tried to persuade him to retire a month or two early. Instead, he started to drink. Worried about whether he was going to be made a director, I suppose. What happened, anyway? Sounded like the hell of an uproar from our place."

"Nothing much," George replied. "Spot of fuss and bother with our new friend Kwotze Baru."

George turned his face as he spoke and Reggie let out an exclamation as he saw the blood on it. He stepped up to him and examined the cut.

"Hmm. You'd better come along, too. You're going to need stitches in that. Nasty cut. What was it—a rock?"

"Yes." George moved his head away irritably. "I'll drop in and see you in a little while. Have to make some arrangements first—wire London and let them know about Arthur. I take it he'll be out of action for several days

at least?"

"For good, probably. And certainly not less than a month."

George turned to Anson. "Would you mind stepping across and asking the intrepid Mr. Cooper to come and see me?"

Anson waited while the orderlies carried Arthur out of the office, then walked towards Cooper's room. Amanquah was standing in a doorway, his expression an odd mixture of fright and defiance. "So you had to go and see the shaft clerk about a job, eh?" he observed sarcastically. Amanquah turned away without replying and Anson felt an illogical twinge of sympathy for him. George had squashed their little insurrection so effortlessly and now Amanquah would probably lose his job into the bargain. He knocked on Cooper's door and stepped inside. It was empty. He moved forward to look behind the desk, grimacing at the absurdity of expecting to find another body, before returning to George's office.

"He's not there," Anson told him.

George was at his desk again, writing. "I suppose he went scuttling back to his bungalow at the first sign of trouble. Phone him and ask him to get down here right away, will you. Technically, he's in charge now."

Anson ran his finger down the list of numbers on George's desk and picked up the phone. It was answered almost before the first ring had died away.

"Hallo Mr. Cooper, this is Anson Payne. Mr. Pemberton asked me to phone you...."

"What happened--has anyone been killed?"

"Er, no. There was a bit of a shindy, but nobody got hurt. Unfortunately, the General Manager's had a heart attack."

"Did the police get there? I phoned them."

"Yes." Anson glanced at Chard. "Yes, they're here now. But the trouble's over and Mr. Pemberton...."

"What happened to all the coons? I'm not coming down unless...."

"They've gone," said Anson impatiently. "Everything's back to normal--except for Mr. Hutchinson."

There was a long pause. "Well, if the police are still there... all right, tell Pemberton I'll be down in a few minutes."

Anson put the phone down. "So," said the doctor, who had been sitting perched on the far end of the desk, "I'd better get back and see what I can do for Arthur. Now don't forget, he added, turning to George, "I want to see you

within the next hour. That's a deep cut and its going to need stitches."

"I'll be there," George smiled. "And if you've got any Black Label left, we'll use that for an anaesthetic."

Chard looked at his watch as the doctor left. "Yes, I suppose I ought to buzz off, too. Come to think of it," he added, licking his lips, "it's about that time. Why don't you take me across to your club and buy me a beer?" he suggested to Anson.

Anson was startled. He had imagined it was about half-past three; instead, it was getting on for five o'clock. "Why yes, of course...." He turned to George. "That is, if you don't need me any more, sir?"

"No, you go ahead. And thank you for...for your assistance."

Anson felt himself colouring. "I didn't do anything—it was you. To tell you the truth, I was scared stiff."

"Nonsense. Good show. Now off you go and have a couple of beers. You deserve 'em."

After Chard had sent his lorry full of constables back to the village, they walked across the road to the club. Omuru, the chief steward, was just opening up the bar when they arrived. He stared at them inquisitively as they sat down on stools.

"Well, don't stand there gaping. Bring two beers, one time," Anson said, feeling a comfortable sense of authority. "Cheers!" he murmured, when the beer had been poured.

"Here's to her sister," Chard replied, taking a long pull and licking the foam off his moustache. "Now, you going to tell me what happened. I haven't got a clue yet, you know."

"Not much to tell, really. The management and the union had another meeting this morning, and...." Anson paused, wondering how much of what Arthur had told him was confidential. But Chard was bound to find out in any case, he decided. "And apparently," he went on, "things didn't go too well. Kwotze tried to sit in and had to be thrown out. So he tried to stir things up when the day shift came up. They started to kick up a fuss, and in the end they began to chuck rocks at us. I was in George's office at the time, and we went out on the verandah to stop them. George got whacked on the head by a rock, but he scarcely budged—just stood there looking at them and they all suddenly shut up. He told 'em to push off back to the compound, and they did. That's all there was to it. Then we went back in and found Arthur had flaked out."

"Old stiff upper palaver, eh? Wonder how long it can last."

"What?"

"Never mind," said Chard, revolving his beer glass thoughtfully in the moisture on the bar. "How much do you know about this bird Kwotze? Is he really smart, or just gabby?"

"Not much. I had a run in with him at our ex-serviceman's whatsit. Managed to sit on him, but I think that was because he doesn't speak very good English."

"May turn out to be one of the big shots before long. The rumour is that he and Nkrumah are starting a new party—the Convention People's Party."

"I thought Nkrumah was boss of the United Gold Coast Convention, or whatever it's called?"

"Yeah, he's the secretary. But they're beginning to fall out already about who's going to run things—and he's trying to take over with the new party."

"Well, if Kwotze's one of the big wheels, he's not making much progress round here."

"No, I suppose not. But the blighter gave me a nasty turn when I saw him for the first time last week."

"Oh, why?"

Chard didn't reply at once. He drank some more beer and belched reflectively. "You know I was in Gambia before I came out here?" he resumed abruptly.

"No, I didn't."

"Went there in forty-four, before the war was over. I was invalided out of the army as a crock. Some damned quack diagnosed an unheard of disease when I only had a touch of hepatitis and they booted me out. I was as fit as a bloody fiddle in a couple of weeks and I didn't know what to do with myself so I joined the Liverpool police. Stuck it for nearly a year and then applied for a job in the colonial police, and they sent me out to Gambia. It was a splendid place—just like a dream come true after Liverpool. The wogs fell out about livestock and beat the living Jesus out of each other over a woman every now and then. But most of the time it was just tennis and swimming and chasing the nurses in the hospital at Bathurst."

"They ever let you catch them?"

"Not half! I had one who came from Scarborough. She taught me things I'd never even heard of. Used to put her finger—well, never mind. I was telling you about this bloke Kwotze. I had to go on a patrol up the river.



Routine admin job--count heads in all the villages and put in an annual report. There were only three of us: the wog who looked after the boat, a corporal who was the spitting image of this Kwotze character, and me. And when we were damn near the end of our run, way to hell and gone out in the bush, I came down with malaria. Got a really nasty dose which lasted more than a week."

Chard paused. He looked faintly embarrassed, thought Anson, as though he wished he had never begun the story. "Fact is," he went on, "this corporal looked after me as if he was my bloody mother. Put me in a hut in some grubby little village and stayed with me the whole time. Bathed me with a damp cloth when I was sweating and found something to throw over me when I got the shivers. Every time I came to, he was there, squatting on his heels, dozing. He really seemed to care about me." Chard shook his head, his ruddy face glowing even more brightly than usual. "You must think me a sentimental clot. But it shook me badly when I saw him the other day. I'm almost certain it's the same chap."

"I seem to remember somebody saying he came from Liberia. But he could be the same one. Why don't you ask him?"

Chard grimaced. "Don't want to, really. I may have to sling him in jail in a day or two--or even end up shooting him if things get really rough. Rum business."

Anson looked down into his beer, not knowing what sort of comment was expected. He had always regarded Peter Chard as a younger version of George, briskly self-confident, undisturbed by any misgivings.

"Let's have another beer," Anson suggested.

"No--no thanks, old boy. I must bog off back to the village. There'll probably be all sorts of repercussions to this palaver tonight."

## CHAPTER 18

Nothing significant occurred following Thursday's disturbance. On Friday morning the Africans went underground as usual, but very little work was done. They all sat around in groups, discussing the situation in shrill, excited voices, and Anson was able to move his sample crew into two sections without any opposition from the drillers, arriving back at the surface by eleven o'clock. He phoned Daphne from the mess at lunch time and they decided to postpone the celebration over his selection to play for the colony until Saturday night. A telegram had arrived from London confirming George's appointment as general manager and she was excited.

"I think I'll make you call me ma'am, from now on," she said.

"How does it feel to be the boss's wife?"

"Rather nice—but I suppose it'll soon wear off. I hear you were very brave yesterday, sweetie. George is most impressed."

"Oh, rot. Luckily there was so much noise he couldn't hear my knees knocking."

"Don't be bogus. You're a hero, sweetie."

"If you don't stop calling me that, I'll...."

"You'll what?"

"Put you over my knee and...."

"You can't," she chuckled. "I'm a big girl now, and I get funny feelings if anyone spansks my bottom."

She rang off before he could reply, and Anson returned to his office plagued, as always, by the suspicion that she was playing with him. She must know by now...but on the other hand, did she? he wondered. George would never tell anyone Anson was in a blue funk when they went out on the verandah. He would regard even a hint as bad form, and she probably believed Anson had been just as courageous as George. If so, all sorts of exciting things might be possible in Accra.

He allowed his imagination to conjure up a number of unlikely situations, all offering the privacy they needed, but his stimulating daydreams were cut

short by the phone. It was Bobby Synge, a friend of his from Nsuta, the manganese mine on the other side of Kartwa. He wanted Anson to come over and play tennis that evening and to stay for dinner afterwards. It was an unexpected invitation—people on the mines seldom visited each other except at the weekends—but Anson could think of no good reason why he shouldn't go.

"What about transport?" he objected. "I don't think they'll let me have...."

"No problem," Bobby interrupted. "The Old Man has given me permission to send one of the shooting brakes over to pick you up. What time do you finish work?"

"Half-past four."

"Okay. It'll be waiting for you."

Anson put the phone down and sent the office boy over to his bungalow for his racket and shoes and a change of clothes. At half-past four, when he went out to the parking lot, he paused on the verandah and blinked in surprise. Instead of one of the battered old shooting brakes used to transport people about the mine at Nsuta, he found a gleaming new Humber waiting for him, the driver dressed in uniform, sporting a stylish red fez on his head. Anson recognised the car: it belonged to the general manager. Must be something to do with the cricket business, he decided, stepping into it while the driver held the door for him, enjoying the curious stares of the Africans who were leaving work. By pure good fortune, Charles Liddell came out of the building just as he was being driven away, and Anson smiled at him complacently.

Knowing they would only have about an hour's daylight by the time he got there, Anson changed in the back of the car so that they could start as soon as he arrived. And when he did, yet another surprise awaited him. Half the mine had turned out to watch them; there were more than twenty Europeans standing round the court. He climbed out of the car self-consciously and shook hands with Bobby Synge—something he would never normally have done.

"What the hell goes on?" he demanded. "Is this some sort of tournament? I thought we were just going to have a friendly game."

"So we are. But you're a celebrity now...everyone wants to have a look at you."

"A celebrity? Why, just because I've been picked to play cricket...?"

Synge laughed. "That too, of course—but it's your gallant stand on the verandah of the admin building that's made you famous."

"But...but you've got it all wrong," Anson objected. "It was George Pemberton...."

Bobby Synge smiled pleasantly and clapped him on the shoulder. "Spare us your false modesty, old boy. You can't fool us. Our Old Man was talking to Pemberton this morning, and we know the whole story."

Dimly, Anson began to suspect he was being used. Why else should George have been so generous? He was deliberately, and for political purposes, building Anson up as a hero, knowing that once he accepted the role he would be bound to act in the same way in any future confrontations. But on the other hand, wasn't George merely being himself? A gentleman always gave credit to his subordinates. Anson rubbed his nose, feeling confused. Thinking back, it suddenly occurred to him that perhaps his own nervousness had been far less apparent than it seemed to him at the time.

"Well, let's get cracking and play some tennis," he said. "I feel like a bloody clot standing here with everyone staring at me."

Synge spun his racket. "What is it—rough or smooth?"

"Smooth." Anson won the toss and walked out to knock about for a few minutes before they started the set. It was some time before he could collect his concentration and he lost the first one, even though he had beaten Synge fairly easily in a match a week or two previously. He was unsettled because new possibilities kept occurring to him. All at once he began to wonder whether George hadn't been nervous too, yesterday afternoon—and thus genuinely grateful for Anson's support. He disliked the idea because it seemed to make George more human, somehow; and just at the moment he didn't want him to be too human. But it might easily be true: one never really did know what was going on in someone else's skull. It was always the same in this flaming little sweathole of a place—everything got muddled up and confused. He'd never before suffered any doubts about what courage was, he reflected, holding out his hand for more balls from the ball-boy after missing an easy lob and losing the game.

Anson managed to clear his head. His concentration returned and he began to win comfortably. He was vaguely aware of groups of people who kept strolling down from the club to watch for a little while, and a clean elation gradually replaced his anxiety. After all, what did it matter whether one really was a hero or not, as long as everyone thought so. Perhaps all heroes were the same—scared stiff, but capable of concealing the fact. He grunted with satisfaction as a backhand drive kicked up a spurt of chalk on the baseline and left Bobby standing helplessly in the middle of the court.

"Greedy bugger, aren't you?" Bobby complained cheerfully, as they walked off the court in the dusk. "Not only a hero, but you have to make me look like a rabbit as well. I think we'll have to give you the treatment tonight. Get you good and drunk and cut you down to size."

"Uh-uh, not on a Friday night," said Anson. "The coons are watching us like hawks now, and we have to be very sober and responsible. Tell you what—we're going to have a bash in the club tomorrow night to celebrate my cricket thing. Why don't you come over and we'll do some serious drinking?"

"Thanks. I'll see if I can make it."

They walked up the hill to the club for a beer before returning to Synge's bungalow for dinner. It was very full and everyone turned to look at them when they walked into the lounge. Anson suspected their interest had probably been stimulated more by gossip about himself and Daphne than anything else; but there was no denying how pleasant it was to be the centre of attention. Everybody wanted to talk to him, and he had to repeat the story of what occurred the previous afternoon until he grew tired of trying to find diffident phrases. Hugh Austin, the general manager, came across to have a word with him.

"Congratulations," he said, pulling up a chair between Anson and Synge.

"Thank you, sir. But I'm sure I don't deserve it. Bobby here's a much better all-rounder than I am."

"I wasn't talking about cricket—I meant yesterday's palaver. Might have turned into a serious riot."

"I doubt it...I think they were just trying it on."

"Yes, that's what you say now. But it could've been a nasty business. And we're particularly bucked about the way you sat on this Kwotze Baru begger—made him lose an awful lot of face. With a bit of luck we'll be able to run him right out of the area before long."

"Hope so," said Anson. "I'm afraid with all this fuss they might cancel the game with Nigeria."

"Not now. Things are bound to quieten down after this. Anyway, make sure you show those snobs in the Secretariat and score a century for us. They don't usually allow the mining proletariat to play for the colony."

After a dinner of roast guinea hen stuffed with yams and mushrooms, and several liqueurs, Anson drove back to Kuwassi in the Humber feeling very much at peace with the world. He could, if things settled down, become a

general manager himself before too many years passed--he obviously had the potential. If only the complication with Daphne didn't exist. If only she were married to him instead of George, how happy he could be.

The celebration in the club the following night turned out to be an embarrassing fiasco. This was due in part, perhaps, to Arthur's illness. It seemed wrong, somehow, to be celebrating so soon after he had nearly died. But Arthur had been put on the train to Takoradi the previous day, where the sea air would help him to convalesce, and it was really the Coopers who spoiled the evening. Everyone on the mine had accepted George's promotion to general manager as inevitable--everyone but the Coopers who, in spite of Bert's manifest cowardice, publicly demonstrated their resentment that he had been passed over. Murial had been with Bert on the mine for the past eight years, and until recently never doubted he would succeed Arthur. She had obviously been crying for hours. Her eyes were red and swollen and she sat the whole evening, glaring at Daphne so vindictively it was impossible to ignore her. Anson tried to feel sorry for her, but it was very difficult because Bert was such a tea leaf. For months he had been going round prophesying disaster and bloody massacre; and his behaviour the day before yesterday made it painfully obvious how unsuitable he was for the job.

Nevertheless, they drank black velvets--a mixture of champagne and Guinness--and tried to whip themselves up into a party mood. Bobby Synge and two of his friends arrived at half-past nine, and for a little while it seemed as though the party was going to develop into a memorable one. George, sporting a big patch of plaster over his wound, was toasted, Anson was toasted, and the atmosphere of mutual admiration produced a glow which promised to triumph over the Cooper's obstinate gloom. Everyone hoped they would leave early, but they stuck it out to the bitter end, and it was impossible in the long run not to feel uncomfortable. To make matters worse, Daphne was more noticeably affectionate than she had ever been before. Anson deliberately left her with George and the Thorntons and went to sit with Bobby at another table when he arrived. But a few minutes later she caught his eye, beckoning to him to come and dance. And afterwards she returned to sit with him at his table, sent the steward to fetch her drink. Her eyes shone and she looked more lovely than ever. Anson tried to persuade himself that she was happy about George's promotion; but every now and then he caught her looking at him with an expression that made his heart beat a little faster.

George stayed much longer than he usually did, but by one o'clock he

had had enough and he came across to fetch Daphne. The party began to break up at once and, after saying goodbye to his guests from Nsuta, Anson accepted a lift with George.

"When will you be moving into the G.M.'s bungalow?" he asked George, as they drove down the hill.

"Not for a week or two. Reggie was talking to the doctor in Takoradi this morning. Apparently Arthur's stroke wasn't too serious, so he may want to come back and pack his gear himself before he goes home."

"Tough way to finish up."

"Mmm." George braked and swerved slightly to avoid a dog whose eyes suddenly glowed in the headlights. "On the other hand though, it may have been a blessing in disguise. Arthur was inclined to dither and change his mind too often. Not nearly firm enough with the Africans."

"He wasn't well," Daphne objected.

"Yes, but even so."

Sitting in the back of the car, Anson made no comment. He looked at Daphne's head, which was resting on the back of her seat, and resisted a fierce temptation to reach up and stroke her hair. He waited a moment or two for the dust to settle after George pulled up at his bungalow.

"How about a round of golf in the morning?" Daphne suggested.

"Love to. What time?"

"Why don't you come and have breakfast with us--then we can go whenever we're ready?"

"No thanks. I'm too grumpy at breakfast. I'll come round about nine."

"You'll have to let me win now," she chuckled. "Can't beat the boss's wife at golf."

"I have enough trouble, in any case," Anson replied, climbing out of the car and slamming the door. "Thank you for the lift, sir. See you in the morning."

Anson awoke the following morning with a sense of exhilaration he hadn't experienced for a long time. He was out of bed before eight o'clock, infuriated Henry by singing in his bath and then chasing the cook's two sons round and round the bungalow, both of them screeching with excitement. The Sunday omelet tasted light and fluffy for once. He drank three cups of tea and taunted Amadou about his very obvious hangover.

"Full of yourself this morning, aren't you?" Charles complained. "I suppose you think you're the cat's pyjamas now, just because some wog threw a

rock at you and missed."

Anson laughed smugly. "And where were you, Charles, when the rocks started to fly? I'll bet you were under the drafting table." He stood up and shouted for Amadou to take his clubs down to the golf course and find a caddy, then sprang down the front steps, chased the cook's sons again, and set off along the road to George's bungalow.

George was working in his garden and he told Anson Daphne was waiting for him inside. Anson ran up the steps and through the open door into the lounge. She was sitting on a footstool, still dressed in her pyjamas, giving the day's instructions to the houseboy.

"Oh my aunt! I wasn't expecting you yet," she gasped, jumping up and disappearing hastily into the next room. A moment or two later she opened the door again and stood, bathed in the sunlight streaming through her bedroom window.

"Tell Somu to bring you a cup of tea," she smiled. "I'll be out in a jiff."

"Yes. Yes, thanks—I will," said Anson.

She had stood in the doorway long enough for him to see that she was stark naked.

"Make you bring tea," he told the boy, turning to walk out onto the verandah. His hands were shaking as he lit a cigarette, the dazzling, golden-white image of her body still vivid in his mind's eye. He felt stunned.

A few minutes later Somu shuffled out and put a tea tray on the table, then walked down to the bottom of the garden to fetch George.

"Well," said George, wiping his hands on a piece of rag as he walked up the steps, "off to play that stupid game again?"

"Almost anything we do is absurd when it comes down to it."

"Eh?"

"Nothing. I've been talking to Reggie too much. Who's that?" Anson asked, nodding to the boy weeding a flower bed. "Is that the garden boy I brought down from Kolwesi for you?"

"Yes, that's him."

"I've been meaning to ask you for ages, but I kept forgetting...how did he turn out?"

"Bush!" said George. "Even more bush than the last one. I introduced him to a wheelbarrow for the first time two or three weeks ago." He stirred his tea, looking ruefully towards the bottom of the garden. "No more than five minutes later I heard some sort of an uproar going on down at the cookhouse. I



strolled across to see what was going on, and found a bunch of coons howling with laughter while the garden boy walked down the path with a fully loaded wheelbarrow—on his head!"

Anson looked at George curiously, not sure whether he was having his leg pulled. It was rather a good joke. He turned at a slight sound and saw that Daphne had joined them. She was smiling as though nothing had happened.

"Are you still complaining about poor little Kofi?" she asked, picking up her cup of tea. "It's not fair. He tries so hard to please you."

George smiled affectionately at his wife. "Yes, but I daresay he's just as handy with a rock as the rest of them."

Daphne glanced at the plaster on the side of his head. "What are you going to do, this morning?" she inquired. "I thought you and Wally were driving down to the range?"

"Yes, we were. But Vickers asked us to scrub it. They're thinking of collecting up all the guns in case anyone gets panicky and takes a pot at the Africans just because they're kicking up a row. I'll stick around and straighten out the vegetable patch instead. See you at the club later on." He put down his cup. "Give me a shout when you're ready and I'll run you down to the course."

Daphne sat with one thigh balanced on the verandah rail, watching George's retreating back. "It's a shame," she said. "He's so good at managing them, but he doesn't like them." She picked thoughtfully at a bubble of dried paint. "I think they're such fun. They're always laughing."

"Yes," Anson agreed. "And always watching...and always talking!"

She looked up at him for a moment and he thought she was about to speak; instead, she slipped down to her feet.

"Let's go before it gets too hot."

George drove them down to the first tee. The course was almost deserted. People must think they would be more vulnerable out on the course if any trouble started, thought Anson, wondering why he didn't feel that way. While they were waiting for their caddies to walk down the fairway, a lorry pulled up in a cloud of dust and deposited the four Scotsmen who lived in one of the bungalows next to the assay office, close to the minehead. They were all shiftbosses, ex-coalminers, and for more years than anyone could remember they competed and quarreled for half crowns on a Sunday morning. They took their golf very seriously, and disapproved strongly of women on the course because they considered them much too frivolous to appreciate the importance of a shrewdly constructed

round.

Anson hit a respectable drive, but unfortunately Daphne sliced hers and it dribbled into the rough. "We'll try not to hold you up," said Anson apologetically.

"Ye'd better not," said Jock Sutherland, and Anson pulled a face at Daphne as they began to walk briskly down the fairway.

Daphne suddenly slowed her pace. "To hell with those old grouches," she said. "I'm not hurrying for them."

The caddy had found Daphne's ball when they reached it. It was lying just on the edge of the fairway. Anson was sure it had gone into the bush and he suspected the caddy had lifted it out with his toes. "Might as well play on," he said. "If you're going to have luck like that they'll never catch up with us."

Two holes later, when they had left the foursome well behind, the same thing happened again. Anson beckoned to her caddy. He came towards him with a cautious smile on his face.

"Let's have a look at your foot?" said Anson.

"Massa?" The boy's expression became even more wary. He stopped just out of Anson's reach.

"Yes, you little brat. You know perfectly well what I mean, don't you? You go bring ball out from bush again, I go clobber you."

"No savvy, massa."

"Oh yes you do...."

"Stop bullying him," said Daphne. "I think it's rather sweet. He's trying to be gallant."

"Gallant my eye! He's hoping for a big tip...and in the meantime, I'm losing."

"What do you think I should use--a seven or a six?"

"Doesn't matter much. He'll probably kick it onto the green for you, anyway."

Daphne smiled as she stood with her hand on a club, looking towards the green.

"Why did you do that this morning?" he asked suddenly.

She glanced at him quickly, then turned towards the green again. "Perhaps I'd better use a five. It's further than I thought." Flipping her five iron out of the bag, she caught it by the handle and stood waiting while the caddy walked up the fairway.

"Why?" he insisted.

She flexed her fingers on the grip of the club and looked up at him with a smile. "I don't know," she admitted. "Can't think of a single excuse. Because it was a lovely morning. Because I felt happy. Because you looked so...."

"For heaven's sake, Daphne! The houseboy could easily have seen you and then...."

"Who cares. I want someone...." She shook her head angrily. "You wouldn't understand, you don't know what it's like living with a—a symbol of empire. He's not human. Once a week. On Saturday night. So quickly I'm still dry...." Daphne broke off and shook her head again, her eyes screwed shut. "I'm sorry, it's something I promised myself I'd never talk about to anyone."

Anson gazed at her in consternation. Her eyes were blurred with tears when she opened them. "Better play your shot," he said awkwardly. "They'll be catching up with us again."

Daphne tried to hit the ball too hard, topping it badly. But it kept rolling on the dry, baked ground—rolling and hopping up and down until it very nearly finished up on the sand green.

"Unlucky in love..." she murmured wryly, chopping at the coarse grass along the edge of the fairway as she began to walk after it.

"I wish I could think of something to say. It just doesn't make sense, though. Why on earth did you marry him? You're so bloody attractive you could've...."

"Uh-uh, the subject's closed," said Daphne firmly. "Let's talk about your love life instead. A little bird told me you had a girl in your room the night I phoned you about the cricket."

Anson swung, one-handed, demolishing a tiny anthill with his driver. "Hmm. I thought it wouldn't be long before Liddell spread that around."

"He couldn't wait to tell Betty Thornton—and Betty couldn't wait to tell me. Was it fun?"

"No, of course it wasn't. I told you you spoiled my evening. I kicked her out."

"Whatever for? There's no reason why you should live like a...like a monk, or something."

"Don't be silly. You know perfectly well why."

Daphne slipped her hand under the rolled up sleeve of his shirt as

she walked beside him and rubbed his arm gently. "Oh dear," she sighed. "Life is difficult, isn't it. What shall we do--run away together?"

"Where to...and what would I do to earn a living?"

"That's what I adore about you, sweetie. You're so romantic." She dropped her hand from his arm and turned to walk to where her caddy was waiting by her ball.

"Go and take the pin out," she told him, with a smile so ravishing Anson's heart turned over. "I'm going to sink this one."

## CHAPTER 19

Although people kept assuring themselves they were prepared for any eventuality, the trouble which developed in the club the following Saturday night still came as a surprise, the climax to a turbulent week. On Tuesday, Rioting had broken out in Accra. The police opened fire on a group of demonstrators who tried to storm Government House at Christianborg, and several Africans were killed. This touched off disturbances all over the colony. On Wednesday afternoon, another Indian and two Syrians were killed in Kartwa. And on the mine, there had been so many disturbances and disruptions that George was seriously considering closing it down in order to discipline the Africans. A week or two without pay would soon bring them to their senses. London office reacted to the suggestion with a series of urgent telegrams forbidding him to do any such thing; they were terrified the Africans would retaliate for loss of wages by blowing up the power station or the mill. George smiled and tossed the telegrams aside.

But despite the atmosphere of tension and potential violence--the atavistic visions of big buck niggers slaughtering and raping by the light of flames in the middle of the night--none of the Europeans could really bring themselves to believe anything was going to happen. The reasons put forward by the Africans for their dissatisfaction were so inconsequential, and often so ludicrous, it was impossible to take them seriously. All sorts of absurd rumours were circulating. One, that the swollen shoot disease, which was causing havoc in the cocoa plantations, had been deliberately introduced to destroy the country's principal industry and thus keep it in subjugation. Another, that all the sugar in the stores had been treated to render Africans impotent so that Europeans could take over the country as they died out. Then there was the sudden, inexplicably heavy demand for Brylcreem. Nobody could fathom what they were doing with it; until, a few days ago, Reggie Thornton learned from the M.O. in Accra that they were spreading it on bread to eat and using it to cook with, as a substitute for

the tinned butter and lard in the stores which had fallen under the same stigma as the sugar. They were silly, exasperating children, Anson reflected sourly; and George was quite right—they needed a good, sharp rap on the knuckles.

For Vickers had phoned Anson on Thursday morning to tell him the match against Nigeria was postponed for a fortnight. If they couldn't play it then, it would have to be called off altogether because of the rainy season. It was a bitter disappointment, and although Anson tried not to be sulky about it, he was. On Saturday, after a series of phone calls between the two mines, the Prestea tennis team finally decided to come down for their scheduled match. Anson lost, both in singles and doubles. He was trying to hit the ball too hard, and he shouted unnecessarily at the ball boy and behaved rather shabbily. He was glad he didn't have to entertain that night; the Prestea team agreed to stay only long enough for a drink in the club after the match before returning home.

He went back to his mess in the lorry after seeing them off, took a bath and eat his supper, determined he would not return to the club. But by nine o'clock, when the lorry made its round to take people to the Saturday night dance, he was too restless and depressed to stay by himself in his room. He would go for an hour or so, then have an early night. Sitting in the back of the lorry, he looked out at the dark little hills, huddled inscrutably under the stars, and tried to remind himself how petty and transient his own disappointment over the cricket match was. They were very old hills; remnants of mountains which had gently surrendered their substance to the rains and been swept down to the sea for thousands of years, while countless generations of human beings had hunted and fought and copulated to survive; and they would still be there, only a little more eroded, thousands of years after his own trivial desires and passions had been extinguished.

Heart of Darkness, he thought. But Reggie was right about Conrad. Conrad had seen something in the African night that wasn't an illusion. The only clear moment of existence occurred when you thought you were about to kill and be killed. According to Reggie, Nietzsche went mad thinking about it, and De Sade spent most of his life in prison because he tried to realize it. Yet it had nothing to do with thought or reflection: it just happened, ready made, incontestible. All the rest of the crew were looking down at the target area when his eyes focussed on the night-fighter with the clarity and precision of a superb photograph. It was a JU 88, coming at them from above and a little

to the right, orange flowers blossoming from its wings and drifting lazily towards them. There was no thought process involved. The first tracer scarcely had time to turn into a hard white light, snapping past his head, when he pulled back on the stick and swung towards the night-fighter, intent on ramming him. The pilot stopped firing at once and obviously pulled back hard on his own stick, but for one brilliant and indescribable moment Anson thought he'd got him. Then the JU 88 flashed above his head, grey belly so close he could see the rivets round the air intakes in the light of the blue flames spitting from the exhaust stubs. He was gone and they flew on into a night lit up by bomb flashes on the ground, shouting profanities at one another on the intercom and laughing and feeling vividly alive. After that Anson knew that violence was not only comprehensible, it was inevitable. If you could conquer your fear of death, even for a fraction of a second, you experienced absolute freedom, an instant of supreme power, and a moment of bright, incomparable joy.

And the Africans knew this too, he realized, scratching a mosquito bite on his ankle and feeling surprised it hadn't occurred to him before. Since time immemorial they had set off to raid another tribe when the desire to kill or be killed became intolerable--and died easily or returned to cherish that immaculate moment of joy. No wonder they made absurd excuses and spouted childish propaganda to provoke violence. The only freedom they really wanted was the freedom to kill one another, and if Europeans were silly enough to try and stop them, they would kill Europeans. One night, any night now, they would come, screen doors creaking, bare feet padding across wooden floors, the machetes they used for clearing bush swishing as they grunted and hacked at figures who would have time only to sit up in bed and cry out. And what about Daphne? She would be raped first, raped with blunt ferocity and then killed. An ugly excitement stirred in him. De Sade come true. To kill at the moment of climax, the ultimate expression of power. He shook his head irritably as he climbed out of the lorry. He was getting more windy than Bert Cooper.

The lounge was only half full when he walked through the door; it was still early for a Saturday night. George was sitting at a table in one corner with John Hampton and they were busy drawing plans on the backs of envelopes--plans for the new development at the ventilation shaft, presumably. Anson nodded to them, got himself a drink at the bar, and walked out to join Reggie on the verandah along the back of the building. He looked surprisingly sober,

standing with a drink balanced on the verandah rail, peering out into the little garden which ended some fifty feet away in a sheer drop over the side of the hill.

"Listen to this," he murmured, as Anson came to stand beside him. In the confusion of noises which normally went unnoticed, it was a moment or two before Anson could make out what he meant. The skip bell clanged urgently at the minehead. A bird, or perhaps it was only a frog, uttered a series of indignant croaks. A cicada, competing with the hum of the mill, rubbed a long note of ecstasy from its legs, and every few seconds the crash and rumble of the ore as it was tipped into the headgear bins by the night shift echoed across the valley. He could hear the voice, but it was a moment or two before he could recognise whose it was. Then he did: it was Vickers. He was down in the garden, quoting poetry, and the quiet words floated up into the soft night air like the milky scent of the frangipani tree he was leaning against.

"Neither the angels in heaven above," he said, and Anson frowned as a fragment of memory slipped through his mind—a big, bare classroom with boards hanging on the walls so that pupils could carve their names on them instead of on the desks; Tusky Munns' squeaky, intelligent voice...gently ironic remarks about Plato and the dangers of inflammatory poetry.

Neither the angels in heaven above  
Nor the demons beneath the deep blue sea,  
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee.

"Balls!" Daphne said it softly but very distinctly, and Anson experienced a peculiar sadness. She started to speak again, but a crash from the minehead drowned her words for a moment—then he heard her again.

...those lips though I hurt you?  
Men touch them and turn in a trice,  
From the lilies and langours of virtue,  
To the roses and raptures of vice.

The doctor let out a fat chuckle, and Anson saw the faint blur of their faces as they turned to look up at the verandah.

"The first is Poe, I think—and it's sentimental slop. I don't know who you were quoting, Daphne, but it's lousy doggerel. You both need a good dose of somebody like Donne. Passion sublimated in metaphysics. The legs of compasses and human legs inscribing circles in eternity."

"To hell with eternity," Daphne laughed, walking back to the verandah steps. "I don't want to be a coy mistress."



"Thou by the Indian Ganges' side..." said Reggie promptly. "Wrong poet—that's Marvell."

"If there's one thing I can't stand, it's a literary snob—always capping everyone else's quotations. Listen! That's more like it."

Someone had put a record on the radiogram. "Cigareets and whisky and wild, wild women." It was a new hit tune, filtered down to the Coast six months after blaring from countless radios in England and the States. There was an appropriate touch of hysteria about it, thought Anson. Hysteria and hedonism—the practical antidote to metaphysics.

"Come on, let's go and dance," Daphne suggested, and they followed her across the lounge to join George and John Hampton, who reluctantly put their envelopes away. Betty Thornton was on the other side of the room, with the Mannings. They came across to join them, pulling tables together and ordering new rounds of drinks. Bert and Murial Cooper were in the club again, sitting with one of the shiftbosses, wearing expressions of determined martyrdom. Vickers danced with Daphne, then went to sit at another table and Anson danced with her.

"Come on, sweetie—promise me you'll buck up," she said, giving him a squeeze and looking up into his face sympathetically after they had danced in silence for a few minutes. "It's only a silly cricket match."

"Easy for you to say. You're going down to enjoy yourself while I have to stay in this hole with nothing to do all weekend."

"Who knows?" She had an odd expression on her face, and Anson shrugged as the music ended and he turned to follow her back to the table. Barbara Manning looked across at Daphne as she sat down, smiling just a shade too pleasantly.

"Rotten luck about next weekend. I hear George is going down to Accra on his own and leaving you behind. Wouldn't trust him if I were you."

"Oh!" Anson looked at George in surprise. "Has your conference been cancelled too, sir?"

"No. But the Governor's asked us not to bring our wives this time. He's afraid there may be more trouble and he'll have to declare martial law."

"Daphne will have to come and stay with us for the weekend," said Barbara firmly. "You can't possibly leave her all alone in your bungalow at a time like this."

"Thank you, dear," Daphne replied, with a smile of such delicate insincerity that the doctor nearly choked in his drink. "But I shall be

perfectly all right. Somu is very dedicated--he'll probably stand guard outside my door all night."

"George," Barbara appealed to him. "You simply can't allow this. It's--it's very dangerous!"

"Oh, I don't think so." George smiled affectionately at Daphne. "I think my wife's quite right. There's really no danger as long as we don't let the Africans think we're nervous."

"Well, I think it's disgraceful. I'd be absolutely terrified if Wally left me all on my own--now, of all times!"

Anson looked up to see the gleam of speculation in both Barbara and Betty's eyes. He felt himself reddening, and he was glad of the sudden disturbance outside the club which made everyone turn their heads. An eerie scream rang out, followed by startled shouts and grunts and the thud of many naked feet running in the road.

"Now what?" said Wally, as they all stood up and hurried across the lounge onto the front verandah to see what was happening. By the time they reached it, the road was empty except for the four Scotsmen who lived in the bungalow by the assay office. Each had a golf club in his hand. They marched purposefully up the steps into the club. Their faces were flushed, but they looked remarkably pleased with themselves, ignoring all the questions directed at them as they walked across to the bar, propped their clubs against it and ordered a drink.

When the story of what had occurred was pieced together, it quickly became a sort of legend, and all the Europeans in the club that night returned to their drinks after hearing the Scotsmen's story with a feeling of pride and satisfaction. Jamie Kyle came from the Islands; Jock Sutherland, Seth Brown and Grant Hunter were all descendents of Highland crofters who had drifted into the coal mines and finally ended up on the Gold Coast. They came together quietly and without any fuss. Jock had been the first to establish a claim on the bungalow--which was much sought after because it was so close both to work and to the club--eighteen years ago. Within two or three years, the others moved in with him as people left the mine or retired. They lived up to everyone's expectations of Scotsmen. They were dour, taciturn, played golf, drank together in the club, and seemed to need no other company but their own.

There was something permanent and reassuring about them, and over the years they established a routine that was almost ritualistic. One of their invariable habits was to settle down in their bungalow on a Saturday night,

each with a bottle of whisky in front of him, drinking it slowly, and neat, while they talked. Later, during an evening in which they always drank a full bottle of Black Label before dropping into the club for a night cap, they would sing. Like most Celts, they sang very well, and Anson sometimes heard them when he was passing the bungalow--a Gaelic ballad, sung with exquisite feeling, once brought the tears to his eyes and made him wonder why he felt such a pang of envy. Because they were happy, he decided; happier, perhaps, than anyone he'd ever met before. They could eat what they liked, drink as much as they wanted to, have a woman whenever they needed one. There was nothing else they wanted from life.

On this particular occasion they were still conversing quietly round the table in their lounge, the levels of the bottles a mere two or three inches below the necks, when they heard the sound of what was obviously a sizeable group of Africans going by on the road towards the club. They debated briefly whether or not they should go and see what it was all about--and decided not to. But the Africans (about forty or fifty of them, they estimated afterwards) were less circumspect. The sight of the four Scotsmen, grouped comfortably round the table in the brightly lighted room, was too much for one of them. He picked up a rock and hurled it through the window. The rock plunged through the screen, bounced on the table and smashed one of the bottles of Scotch. It was an act of unmitigated sacrilege. They sat for a moment or two, unable to believe their senses. Then, without a word to each other (so the story went) they dashed to their bedrooms for their golf clubs and plunged out into the night to seek retribution.

As their account was embellished by others, and grew into a legend, there were claims of a brief argument between Jock and Seth over Seth's selection of a club. Seth chose a four wood, and Jock objected on the grounds that nothing blunter than a wedge could penetrate the skull of a coon stupid enough to smash a full bottle of Scotch. In any event, they came out onto the road at a steady trot and, for the first time since Sir Garnet Wolseley marched against the Ashanti in 1874, a Highland war cry rang out in the warm African sky. The group of natives had passed the bungalow by now and the last of them turned to see, ghostlike in the faint light from the bungalow, four large figures thundering towards them, brandishing clubs and screaming as their own grandfathers, if not their fathers, must have done on tribal raids. Gripped by a combination of superstitious fear and ancestral memory, they lost their nerve instantly and turned to run, colliding with those in

in front of them. Within moments panic took hold. Shouts and grunts of alarm filled the air, sickening thuds were heard as they sprinted desperately in all directions, driving the wind out of each other as they met, full tilt in the darkness. Gasps of pain filtered up through the crash of undergrowth as many of them jumped off the side of the hill; and those who had already reached the club, which was evidently where they were heading for, found enough light to break into a dead run and regain the path leading from the minehead down to the compound. In a matter of two or three minutes the road was empty and silent again, but for an occasional groan as somebody extricated himself from an umbrella tree or an acacia bush on the side of the hill. The four warriors paused to catch their breath, then straightened up and nodded to each other. They shouldered their clubs and marched up the road to the club for a drink.

"But what on earth were the coons doing up here at this time of night?" Barbara demanded uneasily, when they returned to their table to discuss the incident.

George chuckled. "Looking for trouble, presumably. And that's just what they got."

The doctor, who had taken advantage of the diversion by sinking several quick drinks, was loosening up nicely. He kept slapping his thigh in delight. "Too good," he crowed. "Much too good to be true. Hell hath no fury to compare with a Scotch golfer who's just lost a bottle of whusky!"

"Oh, shut up!" Betty snapped. "What if they decide to come back again?"

"Not in a month of Sundays," said Vickers. "And if this bloke Kwotze was involved, he'll never live it down. He'll be laughed right out of the country."

"How do you know?" Bert Cooper's loud voice cut through their conversation and they turned to look across the room at him, startled. "What are we going to do if he goes and collects a thousand of them from the compound and then comes at us?"

In the sudden silence, George frowned briefly. "I'll tell you what we'll do, Cooper," he replied calmly. "We'll chase them right back down that hill again."

Laughter and ironic cheers broke out all round the lounge. More drinks were ordered and the atmosphere grew festive. Reluctantly, Vickers refused another one.

"No can do," he sighed. "I'll have to go and round up Chard and find

out what it was all about. See you later."

He walked away, ignoring the chorus of protests that he must have one for the ditch, his expression as anxious and intense as ever.

"Nice chap," Anson remarked.

"Yes," Daphne shrugged. "But he hasn't got it."

"Got what?"

"Go and put some more records on, sweetie. I want to dance. Everyone's in a good mood again."

"Your word..." he said, beginning to rise; but somebody had already done so. He held out his hand for her as the music began. She was excited, he could almost feel her glowing. She held him much too closely, burying her face in his neck for a moment as they moved away.

"For Pete's sake, Daphne," he said, in a pleased voice. "Everyone's watching us."

"No they're not. They're all too busy worrying about whether the coons will come back."

"That's the first time I've heard you call them that. Are you...."

"Poor things. They're still frightened of you and George, and those stupid Scotsmen." She looked up into his face. "What do you think about next weekend?" she asked abruptly.

"Nothing. Just browned off because I can't go."

"Will you bring me to the dance next Saturday?"

"No, of course I can't. Oh, I don't know. Let's wait and see."

"All right." She brushed her lips against his cheek, pressed her hips firmly to his as they danced, smiling contentedly as he attempted to move away from her.

"Yum yum," she murmured, slipping out of his arms as the music ended.

Charles Liddell was waiting behind their table to rush in and ask Daphne for a dance as soon as the music started again. Anson excused himself and went to the men's room to comb his hair and try to cool off. He took off his shirt, washed his face and neck in the tepid water. When he put his shirt back on he was still sweating and he walked out onto the back verandah to see if there was a breeze. There wasn't. The night was thick and velvety. Flint sparks for stars, a sliver of moon, the lights from the bungalows across the valley twinkling like sequins. A stag beetle droned past his head out of the darkness and crashed into the glass bowl around the light. Everything moving uncontrollably, he thought. Some force pushing all the time. What the

hell was going to happen next weekend now. He couldn't, surely, have misinterpreted what she had just said—and the fact that she was deliberately refusing to stay with the Mannings? Vickers didn't have it—which meant that he did. Anson remembered some of the tiresome girls who insisted on hanging around him when he wanted to drink beer with the boys and talk about flying during the war. Funny how uninterested he was then; and odd to think of oneself as attractive in the way girls were attractive to men. It wasn't true, of course. He was attractive here only because there was no competition. Best thing, he decided, turning to walk back to their table, would be to get himself invited to another mine for the weekend. But he knew perfectly well he wasn't going to.

The music had stopped by the time he reached the table. Everyone was talking quietly, as though soft voices could cool the room. George and John Hampton had brought out their envelopes again and they were bent over them. It was hotter than ever and Daphne sat fanning herself with a beer coaster.

"Just tried the verandah and it's no better there," Anson grunted as he sat down.

"Won't it be lovely when the rains come?"

"Only for a day or two. Then it's muggier than ever...." Anson paused as he realized everyone had suddenly stopped talking. He looked up and caught his breath in surprise. Kwotze had just come through the door into the lounge, followed by Dunkwah. They were trying to look unconcerned, succeeded only in looking arrogant, and Anson could see they were very, very nervous. Behind them he made out a number of heads peering eagerly over the verandah steps into the lounge. This was something else, thought Anson. This was it. To walk into the European club must lead to something momentous, something irrevocable. Glancing round the room, he saw the doctor trying to focus on the two figures; Bert Cooper gazing at them with the fascination of a rabbit mesmerized by a snake; and George looking up from his plans, alert, interested, and perfectly calm.

Kwotze sat down at a vacant table by the wall and Dunkwah, after hesitating momentarily, followed suit. George put down his pencil, stood up and walked over to them.

"And what the devil d'you think you're doing?" he asked quietly.

"Is Africa," said Kwotze, his voice breaking badly. "Is my country. No be colour bar for this place. We are having drink."

"This is a private club," said George, "open only to members to to

their invited guests—and you two are neither, so get out!"

"You no fit tell me." Kwotze turned to look insolently at Daphne. "You no fit to look for your wife...."

As with everything he did, the slap in the face George dealt Kwotze was superbly disciplined: loud enough to humiliate and be heard all round the lounge, but not hard enough to be termed violence, to even hint of passion. It wasn't the blow of an outraged husband; it was merely the controlled gesture of established authority. A hissing groan of anger rose from the Africans grouped on the verandah steps, and Kwotze leapt to his feet, his nostrils flaring, his eyes bulging with anger. Anson and Vickers both jumped up and began to walk round the table towards them—then Anson stopped. George was standing perfectly still, wearing the same expression of mild curiosity as when he was struck by the rock on the verandah of the office last week. Kwotze faced him, his shock of hair seeming to stand out more starkly than ever, blue veins throbbing vividly on his gleaming black forehead. His lips were drawn back in a snarl of sheer, primitive ferocity. Yet, after what felt to Anson like a very long time, his eyes fell before George's and his face began to go slack. Abruptly, he turned away, collided with Dunkwah, who was standing petrified beside his overturned chair, then, half-running, half-walking, he stumbled out of the room.

George stooped to pick up the chair, set it on its feet, and turned to walk back to his table. The buzz of conversation which arose was silenced almost instantly by Cooper's voice.

"You fool!" he screamed at George. "You stupid bloody fool! Now they will do something...they'll come back and kill us...."

Len Wormold, the Cornish shiftboss who was sitting with the Coopers, stood up so violently his chair skittered backwards and crashed against the wall. "That's enough," he shouted, smashing his hand down on the table and upsetting his drink. "That's all I can stand. I came to sit wi' you cause I'm sorry for your wife. She's nice—our Murial. But you, you crummy little sod, you're yellow...a chicken-livered, yellow, lousy little creep."

Murial, whose face was as white as the bar steward's immaculate tunic, sat looking at him in a sort of terror. A great, hiccupping sob broke from her throat and she buried her face in her hands. Wormold turned away, shoulders hunched, torn between anger and pity. He shook his head and walked quickly across to the bar for another drink. Anson sat watching her cry and wished he could go across and comfort her somehow. Len was right, she was a

nice woman. He remembered how often she asked him to dinner when he first arrived on the mine, what pains she had gone to trying to provide him with the sort of meals he was accustomed to at home. But for some reason he always remembered her particularly on the night André had told her fortune. André was a Frenchman, an electrician who had jumped ship in Takoradi and come looking for a job on the mine. They were very much in need of one at the time and he was hired. He only lasted for about three weeks--lasted, as a matter of fact, until he was caught forging other people's names to his bar chits--but he had been a character. He was small and neat, and he played the myth of Gallic sexuality to the hilt. One night he offered to read palms, to tell the women who their first lover had been. There were two or three wives at the table, and others turned to watch from adjacent ones. André took Murial's palm in his hand, pressed all the fingers back until only the middle one was extended, then stroked it gently with his own.

"Zere," he said triumphantly, "is your first loveur!"

For some reason Anson was curiously moved by Murial's expression. She blushed furiously as a great roar of coarse laughter rang out, uncertain whether to take offence or laugh herself--and she had looked remarkably pretty all at once. There was something significant about the moment, somehow. It had meant--oh hell, he didn't know what it meant, but he felt very sorry for her now. Besides which, it was a horribly embarrassing situation.

Everyone looked up with an almost audible sigh of relief as Peter Chard ran up the steps into the club. Despite his bulk, he managed to look very dapper, walking briskly into the lounge, slapping his thigh with his cane.

"Hallo there," he said cheerfully. "Hear you've been having some more excitement?" He stopped and frowned as he saw Murial, who was still crying helplessly. "Nothing to worry about now, ma'am," he went on. "I've got my lads out on both roads, and on the footpath to the compound. Won't be any more nonsense tonight."

"Thank you," said George. "It didn't amount to much. Why don't you pull up a chair and have a beer?"

Chard smiled. "Shouldn't really, in uniform. But it's so bally hot I think I will." He took his cap off, tucked it under his arm and walked across to the bar.

As Anson turned to pick up his own drink he heard Betty's angry hiss. "For God's sake, Reggie, not now," she said furiously. They all heard her



and turned to look at the doctor. He was sitting forward in his chair, his face shining with sweat. He was very drunk, but he had a good voice, mellow and resonant, and his words were only slightly slurred.

"He hath disgraced me and hindered me," he recited, softly at first, but growing louder all the time. "Laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and what's his reason?" The doctor paused, looking around as if to quell any rhetorical impertinence, his head swaying drunkenly—then resumed with a roar. "I am a Coon. Hath not a Coon eyes? Hath not a Coon hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons...."

Anson looked at him in astonishment. Was it the real thing? It sounded like it all right, but how could somebody so drunk possibly remember it all? He glanced at George, whose look of indulgence was rapidly changing to anger. George was studying his hands, flexing his fingers and examining them with a blank face while he waited until Reggie stumbled and sank into muttered incoherence, then he caught Daphne's eye and made a slight gesture with his head.

Daphne sat gazing back up the table at him for what seemed an awfully long time and Anson had a sudden premonition of disaster—of something quite irreparable about to happen. He looked down in dismay at her arm lying on the table. During the excitement she had somehow spilled a couple of drops of her drink on it. They lay, golden in the delicate sun-bleached hairs, soft and gleaming, so lovely and sensuous he reached forward without realizing what he was doing and touched her. She turned towards him abruptly and wrinkled up her nose.

"No more fun tonight," she smiled. "Nine o'clock?"

"Nine?—oh yes, of course, golf. Yes, I'll be there."

He stood up as she left the table, and Peter Chard walked across from the bar to sit beside him. Chard put his cap and his cane down on the floor beside his chair, and took a long pull at his beer.

"It's the heat," he sighed, running his tongue along the bottom of his moustache. "Makes everyone so blooming melodramatic. Be all right when the rains come."

"No more fun?"

"Eh?"

"Nothing." Anson nodded to the steward, who had come to see if he

wanted another drink, and looked around at the emotional debris in the lounge; at the Coopers, sitting white-faced and defiant now; at Reggie trying to snap fingers, on which his eyes could barely focus, for the steward; at Betty's tight, bitter face. But how did he feel about it all? he wondered, chuckling to himself suddenly as he realized he felt wonderful. A little drunk, perhaps, but alert and vigorous, filled with a thoroughly illogical optimism.

"Fun!" he said again, and Chard looked at him curiously.

## CHAPTER 20

The message was brief and explicit. Kwotze was to go to a certain address in Secondi and await further instructions from Nkrumah. He made up his mind at once to refuse; it would be folly to leave now, just as he was on the verge of success. But after thinking about it all day, he realized he would have to go. They would cut off his salary, send somebody else up. Angrily he packed his suitcase next morning, bought a ticket and boarded the train. Arriving at Takoradi, he learned that Nkrumah was in hiding from the police; no actual warrant had been issued for his arrest but he was wanted for questioning. Everyone, he discovered, was talking about Nkrumah in tones of adulation. He had become the undisputed hero of the independence movement and Kwotze suffered a pang of bitter envy. Why couldn't he have been on the run too, the mine shut down, Europeans cowering in their bungalows? Because no one in Kuwassi had the courage to follow him. Afraid of losing money, they refused to strike; afraid of Europeans, they wouldn't back him up when he invaded the club. Instead they scattered like frightened children. Less than a dozen of them had returned with him the second time.

Leaving the station, Kwotze went to the bazaar, dawdling aimlessly to pass the time until it got dark, and trying to spot who was following him. He walked down alleyways, doubled back quickly, stopped just around corners and froze in doorways. But no anxious, hurrying figure suddenly caught up with him; and during the long walk to Secondi he was finally forced to accept the fact that the authorities no longer considered him worth watching. He had thrown away his golden opportunity in the club on Saturday night. If he had hit back at Pemberton he would be in jail now, a hero. He passed a policeman, standing idly on a corner, and the policeman barely glanced at him. A few minutes later he stopped to ask directions from a mammy squatting on the pavement, cooking a meal over a charcoal burner. The address he was looking for was just around the corner, she told him indifferently. Reaching it, he paused outside the little wooden boarding-house for a long time, rehearsing what he was going to say.

The man who opened the door to him nodded curtly when Kwotze gave his name. He was neither friendly nor interested, but he did have instructions to see that Kwotze was taken to Nkrumah, and after sitting around for more than an hour, Kwotze left through the back of the house with a twelve year old boy as a guide. Once again, they played the game of doubling back several times to make sure they weren't being followed, then took to the roofs in the old Secondi bazaar. The moon wasn't up yet, the boy far more agile than Kwotze, and Kwotze found himself panting as he tried to keep up. He had several bad moments stepping from one building to another, but at last they dropped down onto a second-story verandah and the boy tapped on a window. It was opened at once, Kwotze was admitted, and the boy disappeared back over the rooftops without a word.

The room Kwotze climbed into was bare and dirty, filled with smoke from a kerosine lamp with a badly trimmed wick. Nkrumah was sitting on a stool at a small table and a youth of about nineteen, the only other person in the room, went back to sit on the sagging bed after closing the window.

"Was anyone following you?" Nkrumah asked, putting down the newspaper he had been reading.

"No. Two mens following me from station, but I losum in bazaar."

"Good. They know where I am and I think they'll come for me tonight, but I wanted to see you first. Now, what's gone wrong in Kuwassi?"

"Is not bad," Kwotze replied quickly. "This week we are having plenty palaver...."

"You'd better start from the beginning. Everything I've heard has been bad so far."

Nkrumah sat for some time without speaking after Kwotze had given his account of events in Kuwassi during the past few weeks. His eyes kept returning to the headline of the Accra Times, lying on the table in front of him. SEARCH FOR NKRUHMAH INTENSIFIES, it declared. He was obviously fascinated by it and Kwotze suspected he hadn't really been listening to his account. He grew more and more angry as he waited for Nkrumah to speak. He must have known all along that Kuwassi was going to be too hard a nut to crack, that the real opportunity for success and recognition lay in Accra. What could Nkrumah have done in the face of such hesitancy and cowardice--the greed of the miners who kept agreeing to strike, then turned up for work because they weren't prepared to sacrifice a single day's pay?

"Hmm," Nkrumah grunted at last. "Pity I couldn't go up there myself..."

but it's out of the question now. Tell me, what makes you so afraid of this man Pemberton?"

"Afraid?" Kwotze looked at him savagely. "I am not being afraid of any white man...."

"Yet you let him slap your face in public without doing anything about it?"

"He will pay for this thing."

"How? And when?"

"This week. This week we are having strike...."

"Yes, you've been promising that for a long time now. But I'm talking about this other business. Why didn't you hit him back, start a riot in the club, get yourself arrested...anything?"

"They no stay with me. Everyone run for compound...." Kwotze broke into an angry spate of Fanti.

"That's enough," said Nkrumah peremptorily. "Up to now you've done nothing but make a fool of yourself, but I'm going to give you one more chance. I can't do anything more for the moment—they're going to try to deport me, so I'm relying on you. And if you don't produce any results in the next week or two at Kuwassi, everything we've done—all our work down here will have been wasted...."

"You not telling me how I go do it, huh? You no savvy Kuwassi palaver atall...."

"If you'll shut up and listen to me for two minutes," Nkrumah shouted suddenly, "I will tell you." Kwotze rubbed his nose vigorously and looked down as Nkrumah launched into one of the long lectures he was so fond of. He talked for nearly half an hour, suggesting courses of action which sounded delightfully easy from this distance. He had grown even more domineering since Kwotze last saw him, more irritatingly vain about his growing popularity. Several times Kwotze broke into Fanti again as he tried to dispute something, and each time Nkrumah stopped him. He claimed that Kwotze must learn to speak English effectively, but Kwotze was convinced it was done simply to put him at the same disadvantage as he was with the white man. In any case, Nkrumah kept repeating, the time for words was past; they needed action now. And the only way to accomplish this was for Kwotze, as a leader, to prove he wasn't afraid to go to jail—or even die, if necessary—for the cause.

The accusations of cowardice made Kwotze seeth with rage. He still couldn't quite understand himself why he'd turned away from Pemberton in the

club—but he did know it would have been futile to hit back at that particular time. He tried to explain this to Nkrumah, succeeded only in making it sound like an excuse, and relapsed into a sullen silence.

"Break the law," said Nkrumah. "Break it and make them put you in prison. Then you'll be a martyr and a hero and people really will start to follow you."

"Yes, and other peoples take leader while I am being in jail," Kwotze replied bitterly.

"As long as you think that, you never will be one. Now, let's get back to this man Pemberton. What have you found out that we can use against him? He must have some weaknesses—everyone has. Does he drink?"

"Small-small. He no fit for stupid."

"But he's just got married, hasn't he—someone much younger than himself?"

"Yo."

"So, what about before he was married? Did he have women...and if so, does his wife know about them?"

"Yes," Kwotze replied irritably. "But she no make palaver. All time she go with young fellow Payne."

"Well then?" Nkrumah threw up his hands. "All you've got to do is catch them at it and make sure everyone knows."

Kwotze blinked unhappily. How to explain the frustrations and disappointments of a relationship nobody could understand. "Is not being easy," he said. "All time talk—no jig-jig atall. We look them plenty too much."

"And you don't think they're going to?"

"Maybe he no be fit," he shrugged. "One girl from compound go for his room, he no jig her. Put hand for her, then he go stop. Send her back for compound. She no savvy. She feelum. He make hard plenty but no jig-jig."

Nkrumah frowned. "It doesn't need to happen. Just wait until they've spent enough time together, then tell everyone it has. Get some witnesses to say they saw them...."

Kwotze shrugged again and shook his head. "They savvy too much. No fit stay without other peoples."

"Well, keep watching them and find out...." Nkrumah broke off as they heard footsteps running along the corridor. The door flew open and three men came through it, excited, breathless. "Police come," said one of them. "Police come all round bazaar."

"Good," said Nkrumah quietly. "If they hadn't found me tonight people

would begin to think I was afraid of them. Does everyone know they were told where to find me?"

"Yo, all peoples know this thing."

"All right, well you know what to do now. We want as many people as possible to see them take me away. Go and get them out. Bang on doors, make a noise--and tell everyone else you see to do the same, understand?"

They nodded eagerly and turned to run back along the corridor. Within moments the little house began to echo with shouts and crashes.

Nkrumah turned to the youth who had jumped up off the bed. "Now you, Kosi, get over to the Mafuto Store--there's a phone there. Call the newspapers and tell them the police are raiding the bazaar, looking for me. Come on, one time!"

Kosi disappeared through the door with the same alacrity as the other three. Nkrumah picked up the newspaper and studied the headline again with satisfaction.

"What about me?" Kwotze demanded. "I go stay?"

"Why not? It's me they're after."

Kwotze sat down on the bed, listening to the growing tumult in the street. Nkrumah climbed through the window, stood on the verandah for a few minutes, peering out into the darkness, then came back into the room.

"Here they come," he said, looking so pleased with himself that Kwotze had to bite off a sarcastic retort. They sat for a good five minutes, listening to the heavy boots of the policemen as they tramped through the house, checking each room and questioning people. At last the police appeared at the door, two Europeans and several African constables, led by an elderly superintendent with iron-grey hair and a bored expression on his face.

"Ah, there you are," he said. "We've been wanting to have a chat with you for several days. But you knew that, of course," he added, gesturing to the newspaper on the table. "Would you mind coming down to the station with us?"

"Are you arresting me?" Nkrumah demanded aggressively.

"No, laddy, we're not. But I can, if necessary. We have rather more than a suspicion you were responsible for the march on Christiansborg Castle. And as you know perfectly well, a number of people were killed in that irresponsible little caper. I think you'd be much better advised to co-operate with us than insist that we arrest you."

The superintendent looked across at the window, where an argument had

broken out between the crowd of Africans who had climbed up onto the verandah and were trying to peer into the room. Kwotze could hear more of them thudding down off the verandah rail or the roof all the time.

"Better shut the window," the superintendent grunted. The young European policeman with him walked quickly across the room and slammed it down.

"Well?" said the superintendent, turning back to Nkrumah, his voice as unconcerned as though he were awaiting a routine decision. Kwotze saw that Nkrumah's expression was obstinate, defiant, in fact, and his heart began to beat with excitement. Perhaps now, if Nkrumah refused, they could start the real revolt, and he would be part of it.

"I must warn you against trying to start any trouble," said the superintendent. "We have the whole area cordoned off, you know."

Nkrumah looked up at him. "I will come with you," he said calmly. "I have done nothing wrong."

"Splendid." The superintendent glanced at Kwotze, seemed to notice him for the first time. "Who's this?" he asked.

"I am Kwotze Baru."

A flicker of interest showed in the superintendent's eye. "Oh, so they've chased you out of Kuwassi, eh? Heard you weren't making much headway. Put his name down on your report," he said to the young lieutenant who was taking notes. "And Sergeant, make sure the corridor and stairway are clear so that we can get him out of here."

"Is clear now, sah," the sergeant replied promptly.

The superintendent turned back to Nkrumah. "Well then, if you're ready now?"

Nkrumah stood up and left the room, a faint smile of amused resignation on his face. Nobody gave Kwotze a second glance. He listened to the tramp of boots retreating down the corridor for a moment, then turned to the window. There were no faces pressed against it now. He could hear shouts and scuffling on the verandah as people tried to find their way down to the street again. A collective groan surged up into the night. Nkrumah must have appeared at the door. The noise swelled and seemed to spread in all directions as voices in other streets took it up. Kwotze sank down onto the bed, gazing at an old Unilever calendar with a faded picture of a ship loading cocoa at the docks. He rubbed his nose so fiercely tears came to his eyes.



## CHAPTER 21

Once again things seemed to settle down after the turbulent Saturday night in the club. The Africans were still excitable and belligerent, but less so, it appeared to Anson, than before. Some change had occurred in his own status with them. He could venture a joke again and see smiles on their faces--the sort of smiles which made his relationship with them rather pleasant when he first arrived on the mine. This was due partly, he suspected, to his selection to play cricket for the colony, and partly to his appearance on the verandah with George when the rocks had been thrown.

But two or three days of what appeared to be relaxing tensions were promptly dispelled on Wednesday, when the news circulated that Frank Urey, one of the two mine captains at Abonti, had been found dead in the bottom of an ore-pass. It was probably an accident, but there was room for doubt. Frank was an old-timer. Big and irascible, he treated Africans very like children, striking them frequently and punishing them arbitrarily. No one could tell if he had fallen or been pushed, and his injuries were so severe after a three-hundred foot fall down the ore-pass, that the possibility of a blow on the head with a drill steel or an eyebolt before he fell couldn't be proved. His chop boy claimed he was sent to the store for some bailing wire to repair ventilation piping. When he returned, Urey was missing and it took until the next day to find him.

Accident or not, it couldn't have happened at a more unfortunate time. No European could go underground now without visualizing a hat tipped off suddenly, a drill steel arcing through the darkness--or a quick push, followed by a plunge into the oblivion of a dark ladderway or ore-pass. Every one of them recalled times when heat and frustration, perhaps even simple prejudice, provoked them to shout savage insults at the Africans; insults which may have rankled for a long time and which could, when you stopped to think of it, be so easily redressed. It was the first time since the trouble began, nearly a year ago, that a European had suffered anything more serious than George's cut on the head, and now even the most unimaginative European was nervous every

time he went down the shaft.

Anson was no exception, but after suffering an initial qualm every morning, as he walked away from the skip into the darkness, he managed to convince himself he had never said or done anything serious enough to invite actual violence. Instead of worrying, therefore, about being hit on the head, he worried about the coming weekend. As often as he tried to put it out of his mind, it kept returning. He was building it up into a ridiculously improbable crisis and realized vaguely that he was enjoying it. But the potential for trouble was too serious to be ignored. George was due to leave for Accra on Friday afternoon, and on Thursday Anson finally did phone Nsuta to see if he could arrange to be away for most of the time George was. Bobby Synge, he learned, had been sent down to Takoradi to be treated there for a wound on his leg which wouldn't heal. Anson contemplated phoning Matthews or Derek Underwood at Bondaye, then turned away from the phone irritably. Nothing would happen. Who cared what everyone thought. He would take Daphne to the dance on Saturday night, and play golf with her on Sunday, just as he had always done when George was there. George, as a matter of fact, had asked him to.

After lunch on Friday, Anson went down to the station with the Pember-ton, then drove Daphne back to her bungalow after seeing George off on the train. George had offered him the car for the weekend. Anson kept the engine running when he pulled up in front of her bungalow.

"Coming in for a cup of tea?" she asked.

"Better not."

"Are we going to treat each other like strangers the whole weekend?"

"No, but we'll...."

Daphne pulled back the door catch. "The Mannings have asked me to dinner tonight. Can I phone you when I get back?"

Anson was tempted to ask her what for, and to tell her not to. Henry and Charles were always straining their ears to hear what he was saying whenever he was on the phone. "Okay," he agreed. "But don't make it too late, eh?"

He drove back up to his office. It was after four when he got there, and he discovered another near-riot had occurred at the minehead when the day shift came up. Nobody knew quite what it was all about, and nothing in particular came of it; but it was disturbing because everyone felt as Anson did that it would never have happened if George hadn't left. Predictably enough, Bert Cooper immediately called the police. Chard's constables were a little too

enthusiastic dispersing the crowd with the four-foot bamboo staves they carried, and Reggie had to treat a number of scalp wounds. It was both unfortunate and unnecessary. John Hampton had just begun to get the crowd quietened down when the police arrived. But as Peter Chard pointed out, if he was called on to restore order, he must respond, and it was no fault of his if Africans liked hitting each other on the head. As a result the Africans, instead of returning to the compound exhilarated by a noisy demonstration, went back to it mutinous and sullen.

Back in his bungalow half an hour later, Anson sat in his Morris chair wondering what to do with himself. The tennis courts were booked up, and he had left it too late for a round of golf. He kept thinking of Daphne, alone in her bungalow, and the temptation to walk down the road and see her was hard to resist. In the end he decided he must do something or he would succumb. He shouted for Amadou to bring him another cup of tea, and when he brought it, tried to question him about the disturbance at the minehead. But if Amadou knew any more than Anson, he refused to acknowledge it. "No savvy," he kept shrugging, avoiding Anson's eye, and Anson eventually finished his tea, dug out a bag of golf balls and walked down to the course with his driver over his shoulder. He would practise some of the discipline George would have brought to the game, he decided, and do something about his hook.

When he reached the first tee, there was an abundance of caddies but very few golfers. Only two couples were out on the course, and the Mannings were about to drive off. Anson was besieged by a horde of piccanins, all of whom preferred chasing practice balls to carrying a bag of clubs round the course.

"And how does the white man handle this particular burden?" Anson demanded, smiling at the Mannings while he waved the caddies away.

"Select the one you like the look of and tell the rest to shove off," Wally replied with a shrug.

"I suppose," Anson agreed. "But I like playing games." It took him a minute or two to quieten the caddies down, and another five to line them up, handicapping them, as far as he could judge, by age. The eldest were lined up by the tee; the others at ten yards for each year until the smallest were standing, their eyes gleaming with excitement, some fifty yards down the fairway. Anson was reasonably sure they all understood the winner would be the one who retrieved his first drive.

The Mannings had waited to watch and Anson grimaced at them when he

came back and stepped up onto the tee. "What's the betting I fluff it now, and make a fool of myself?"

Wally and Barbara were looking at him with odd expressions on their faces, and Anson coloured slightly as he realized they were looks of disapproval. Luckily, he hit a very respectable drive and the air was filled with screams and yells as the caddies scampered down the fairway.

He watched for a moment and grunted with relief. "Thank God for that—the little bugger in the red shirt's going to get it. I was afraid they'd all get there together."

Anson turned and sat down on the bench with the Mannings while he waited for the boy to return. There would almost certainly be another palaver when he did, but Anson was only filling in time and he lit a cigarette and looked out at the shadows creeping across the fairway, wishing Daphne was with him to share the pleasure of watching the piccanins shouting and laughing as they sprinted down the fairway, their eyes as round and white as golf balls, their teeth gleaming in the late afternoon sun as they turned to see if anyone was catching up with them.

"Pity they don't stay like that," Wally remarked. "They're quite fun when they're kids."

"A lot of them can be when they grow up, too."

Anson saw Wally frown. It had reached the stage where one couldn't risk even a mild sympathy for coons, and he changed the subject, asking Wally questions about the mill. Wally and Barbara teed up when the crowd of caddies had come straggling back. Since they were only going to play five holes, they suggested Anson should wait for them and drive up to the club with them afterwards for a drink. Anson agreed and turned to find a boy at least fourteen years old holding his ball. The boy in the red shirt, who Anson knew perfectly well had been the first to reach it, was standing at the back of the group, crying. Anson held out his hand for the ball.

"Right—now beat it!" he said. "I savvy you no go catchum." He gestured to the boy in the red shirt, who stopped crying at once and came forward eagerly. As he passed the older boy, the older boy hissed something at him and he looked up at him with frightened eyes. It was no good. No matter how hard you tried to be fair, it never worked. The older boy would wait around for the younger, take away the tip Anson gave him, and probably beat him up into the bargain.

"Go on, get the hell out of it, all of you," he said irritably, taking the boy in the red shirt by the arm and pushing him off up the fairway.

Anson soon grew tired of driving balls. Because it didn't matter, nearly every drive was a beauty. Half an hour before the Mannings returned, he gave his caddy a shilling, smiling at how shocked Wally would have been over such inflationary generosity, and sent him back to his bungalow with the driver and bag of balls. He sat, looking out over the little golf course, smoking peacefully and enjoying the strange feeling of optimism which seemed to come with the sunset. The red of the laterite roads softened for a little while, the green of the jungle on the sides of the hills was somehow less overpowering. It was the only time of the day when Anson felt the sort of affection for the land that he felt for the English countryside. All the rest of the time it was alien, if not actually hostile.

As the light began to fade, he saw the Mannings coming up to the fifth green. Closer to him, a small bird with a long tail landed like a spent dart on the edge of the fairway, bobbed up and down, chirping importantly three or four times, then scuttled into the bush. He was about to look away when he realized there was something more substantial just beyond where the bird had disappeared. It was a duiker, its dappled fawn merging with the khaki grass. He could see its big brown eyes now, alert and inquisitive. Its nose moved as it tested the air. It must have caught a hint of the Mannings, or perhaps Anson's cigarette. It took a sudden, almost playful leap forward, stood absolutely motionless for a moment, then melted into the bush.

Anson went up to the club in the back of the Mannings' Austin and they sat on the verandah for half an hour, drinking beer and talking desultorily about the African problem. It was difficult to avoid the subject and almost impossible to say anything which hadn't been said a hundred times before.

"Oh well, perhaps this meeting George's gone to will produce some answer," Anson suggested.

Without looking at her, Anson saw the light catch Barbara's eyes as she glanced up at him quickly.

"That reminds me," she said. "We mustn't be too long. Daphne's coming to dinner, and I said we'd pick her up at seven."

Wally smiled. "That means half-past seven, at the earliest."

Anson snapped his fingers for the steward and ordered another round. He knew Barbara was debating whether or not to invite him to dinner as well. He could sense her excitement at the prospect of being able to observe them together; at the possibility that some slip of the tongue would provide her with a piece of exclusive gossip. He turned to look at her and she dropped

her eyes quickly. Anson signed for the drinks, poured his beer and waited for her to speak.

"Come to think of it," she said at last. "Why don't you come and have dinner with us too? It's roast chicken and we've got plenty."

"That's very kind of you, Barbara, but not tonight, thanks. I've got some letters I've been putting off for weeks. And I didn't plan very well for a Saturday morning--couple of rough samples which'll take a lot of walking and climbing up and down ladders. That's one thing I hope the coons do get out of all this--a five day week, so we can have Saturdays off."

Anson refused a lift with the Mannings when they left. He stayed in the club, drinking another three beers and playing snooker with Les Comings, a new surveyor who had come out to the mine a few weeks previously. He left at half-past nine, just as the after-dinner drinkers were beginning to appear, and walked back to his bungalow to eat the supper left on the stove to keep warm. He heard Henry clearing his throat interminably in his room, and Charles moving about every now and again. He tried to write a letter but the beer had made him sleepy. In the end he gave it up and took the bottle of whiskey out of his drawer. On the way down, he thought, stripping the foil off the cork. He was degenerating into a typical Coaster. For the first seven or eight months he refused to have any booze in his room. Then it was sherry; now Scotch. He was beginning to drink alone. Just a nightcap. He smiled to himself at the familiar excuse and went to get a bottle of soda water and some ice from the fridge in the cookhouse.

Anson drank two Scotches, making them last for more than an hour, then resolutely put the bottle away and sat in his chair, wondering when she would ring. The whiskey had made him alert and wide-awake, and gradually he became aware of the noise from the compound. It would swell to a dull roar every few minutes, the drums clear and menacing in the night, then die away and the silence was somehow more ominous afterwards. He felt a twinge of anxiety as he realized he'd never been able to hear them here before. From the club, often; but not right across here at the mess. They must be really worked up tonight--and George was away. The boys knew it; Kwotze knew it. Somebody'd said Kwotze had given up and left Kuwassi, but he was back in the thick of things this afternoon. The noise gradually lessened and Anson's thoughts turned to Daphne again. He wondered if she was back in her bungalow yet, sitting in a chair as he was, having a drink before she phoned him, listening nervously to the uproar from the compound.

When the phone finally rang, nearly twenty minutes later, Anson was absurdly startled. He was out of his room and across the lounge to pluck it off its hook on the wall before the third ring.

"Hallo, Anson?" Daphne sounded breathless. "Oh sweetie, I'm scared."

"Why? What's happened?"

"Well, nothing really. But the servants have all gone down to the village and—and it's that noise. We've never been able to hear them right over here before, have we?"

"Yes, of course we have," Anson lied.

"Oh, it's not only that. I'm sure I heard somebody out in the road just now—heard someone cough. I know it sounds terribly silly, but they do hate George now and...and I'm afraid they might try to do something to me. Sweetheart, come and sit with me—just for a little while...."

"You know I can't do that," said Anson, almost whispering as he looked anxiously towards Henry's door. It was too dark to see whether it was closed or not. "Why don't you ring the Mannings or the Thorntons?"

"Oh Anson, I can't—really I can't. I had dinner with Barbara tonight and she kept asking me to stay. She wants to patronize me and I was rather pompous. They only dropped me here a few minutes ago, and I never thought I'd be so windy. There are all sorts of noises you never notice until you're alone. Oh sweetie, please! You're the only one I can ask without making a fool of myself."

"But Daphne, I can't possibly come to your bungalow at this time of night. What if somebody sees me?"

"They won't," she said urgently. "Not if you come down the path at the back." She sounded as if she was nearly crying, and Anson stood chewing his lip as he tried to decide what to do. Perhaps he should phone Reggie and get him to come with him. But then everyone on the mine was bound to know and she would be sneered at. "Are you still there?" she asked, so breathlessly that Anson made up his mind.

"Yes," he sighed. "Yes, I'll be down in a few minutes."

He put the phone back on its hook before she could reply, went back to his room, and stood for a few minutes, thinking. What else could he do? It was fate; something as inevitable as the sunrise tomorrow morning. But perhaps, too, he was a bloody fool even to think it. She might very well be shocked, then furious if he tried to touch her. In any case, the feeling that he was no longer responsible began to grow in him, and his heart beat a little faster

as he turned to the bed, slipped his hands under the mosquito net and tried to make the sort of sounds he thought he would make getting into bed. Satisfied that not even Henry's sharp, inquisitive ears could detect the difference, he put on his shirt and gym shoes and stole across to the screen door. It seemed to take hours to open it without a creak, but at last he was out on the concrete walkway, moving swiftly and silently towards the path at the rear of the bungalow. A fierce elation seized him. He listened to the noise from the compound and knew all at once it was nothing more than a monumental drunk. He remembered now it happened not long after he arrived on the mine, and Henry laughed because he was startled by the noise during dinner one night. He reached the path and looked carefully up and down it. Nothing was moving and he began to walk carefully down the thick ridge of dust along the side of it to muffle his footsteps. As he passed Reggie's bungalow he saw that the light was still on in the bedroom and fancied he heard Betty's voice. A few yards further on, a dog suddenly ran at him out of the bushes. He froze, terrified it was going to bark; but it merely sniffed at him for a few seconds before slinking away.

He had almost reached George's bungalow when he pulled up again abruptly, cocking his head to listen. He could've sworn he'd heard the dull pad of naked feet on the path behind him. He looked back, studying the shadows and holding his breath as he listened. It was astonishing how much noise there was in the night when you listened. Cicadas and frogs, dogs barking in the distance, a chicken clucking sleepily, and countless mysterious little creaks and rustles in the bushes. He let out his breath with a sigh, satisfied he'd been imagining things. When he reached her bungalow, he walked round to the front to see if there was anyone in the road. He stood in the shadow of a bamboo thicket, looking carefully up and down it, then sucked in his breath as he saw the figure almost by his feet. He very nearly burst out laughing. The lamp in Daphne's lounge cast enough light for him to make out the fez. Peter Chard had sent one of his constables to guard the bungalow while George was away. He was squatting against the trunk of a baku tree a few feet away from Anson, sound asleep.

Anson went back along the side of the bungalow and climbed carefully up the wooden steps to the kitchen door. He had to scratch twice on the netting before the inner door opened a crack.

"Who is it?" Daphne whispered, so nervously that he felt ashamed of his suspicions.



"It's all right, it's me—Anson. Open up."

She opened the door and undid the latch on the screen. As Anson stepped inside she took his hand and he could feel hers quivering.

"Bless you for coming, sweetie," she said, turning away after flashing him a quick smile of gratitude. Anson felt absurdly disappointed. All the way from his own bungalow he had been picturing a scene in which she would throw herself into his arms.

"I am sorry to be so childish," she said, as he followed her through the kitchen into the lounge.

"Don't be silly—I know how you feel. And, incidentally, there is somebody out in front. Chard put one of his cops on to guard you. He's asleep out there and I damn near trod on him. Scared the daylights out of me."

"I am a fool. Would you like a drink?"

"Yes—I mean, no. I can't stay long."

She turned to him quickly. "Oh, just for a little while, sweetie. You've no idea how frightened I was. I started imagining all sorts of horrible things." She sat down on the settee. "That they might come and--and...well, you know what," she trailed off, looking down at her hands.

"Blimey!" said Anson. "That's one good thing about being a man—you don't have to worry about that sort of thing. Not unless you were on the North-West Frontier, and you had red hair. Then the Afghan women would make you because they thought Allah had red hair and they would father a holy son...."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"God knows. Perhaps I'd better have that drink after all."

She stood up at once. "What'll it be? There's...."

"Scotch, please. With soda, if you've got any."

While she was pouring the drinks at the sideboard, Anson sat down on the settee and looked around the lounge, remembering how bleak and uninviting it had been when he first saw it. Daphne had transformed it. A brightly woven Kano cloth covered most of one wall, the dull brown of the others was relieved by framed water colours. Jade green curtains hung at the windows, the cushions were all covered in material of different colours and even the bare wooden arms of the Morris chairs had slipcovers over them. There were flowers on every table and the big bowl of crimson cannas glowed sensuously in the soft light cast by a single standard lamp in one corner. He felt deliciously isolated in the clean, bright room; but he wasn't, of course, and he turned to watch Daphne walk across it to the kitchen to fetch ice. She was wearing an orange house-

coat and she looked so lovely he felt a stab of helpless anger against George for marrying her. George neither deserved her nor appreciated her, thought Anson bitterly, as he held out his hand for the drink she brought him.

"Cheérs!" she said, sitting down beside him and holding up her drink.

"Cheers!" Anson took a good swallow, then grunted. It was dimple Haig, a full glass of it, almost neat. "Strewth!" he complained. "When you pour a drink, you don't mess around, do you?"

"Is it too strong? I'm sorry, George always pours the drinks." She took a sip herself, licked her lips and giggled. "Hm, you're right. If I sink this and somebody tries to assault me, I'll probably help them."

Anson didn't know how to reply and he reached for his cigarettes.

"Can I have one?" she asked.

"You? But you don't smoke."

"Well, let me try. I feel like one now."

Anson held out his case and lit the cigarette for her. She handled it awkwardly, but as she leaned towards his lighter he saw the line from her chin down to her throat, silhouetted for a moment against the lamp, and a recollection stirred in his mind--the memory of a similar line, clean and pure, etched with a faint halo from the sun which was just coming over the horizon.

"What does that sudden, far-away look mean?" she asked quietly, putting her head back on the cushion and watching the smoke from her cigarette curl up to the ceiling.

"Oh, nothing much."

"Tell me?"

"You might not like it. I saw the curve from your chin down to your throat against the light and it reminded me of one just like it on the Stirling I used to fly during the war. It was the curve of the perspex window on the other side of the cockpit, and one morning when we were coming back over the North Sea, just as the sun was coming up, I noticed it. It was such a pure line, so--so beautifully symmetrical I often tried to catch it again. But I never did until now."

"She turned her head on the cushion to look at him. "What a perfectly lovely compliment."

"That's because you are lovely," he muttered, looking down at his knees. He heard her turn her head on the cushion again and sat wondering what to say next. That was the moment, he told himself. Now was the time to put an arm round her and kiss her. But supposing she pulled away from him angrily? Even

thinking about it made him wince. "Anson, what do you think you're doing?" The awful embarrassment, the humiliation. And if she did let him kiss her, what then? There was always the problem of clothes. She would have pyjamas on under the housecoat, and he would have to pause to get them off somehow, fumbling clumsily and ruining the spontaneity of the moment. At least she probably didn't have a brassiere on, he thought wryly, remembering the fiasco with the girl in Worthing. He had met a very attractive girl at a rugger dance during his de-mob leave. She was a friend of the one he should have taken, but couldn't because she was ill, and she seemed to more or less set her cap at him. In the end she came right out and asked him, blushing delightfully, to take her home. Anson did so without any reluctance because she was eighteen, and very, very pretty. And her shyness made the invitation all the more desirable somehow.

When they arrived at her house she suggested, so diffidently he could barely hear her, that he should come in for a few minutes.

"What about your parents?" Anson objected.

"Oh, they'll be in bed ages ago. Wait a sec—I'll go and check if you like." She jumped out of the car, went into the house and reappeared a minute or two later to wave him in. "All clear," she whispered, her eyes sparkling in the porch light. "They're snoring away upstairs."

But when they were inside, neither of them knew what to do next. The girl found a bottle of stout in the larder and they sat on the settee drinking it, trying anxiously to think of something to say to each other. In the end Anson did what he should have done in the first place: he put his arm around her and kissed her. She responded so eagerly he was encouraged. He slipped his hand between their bodies, fumbling to undo the buttons on her dress, then worked his hand down, trying to get his fingers under her brassiere. By an accident so implausible he had never mentioned it to anyone but her friend, his forefinger poked into the loop where the strap joined the brassiere and became trapped. He struggled to free himself and made it worse. In his embarrassment, he suddenly giggled. "I can't find it," he said.

The girl jerked away from almost as violently as though he had struck her. "What do you mean?" she gasped. And then, before Anson could think of a reply, she started to cry. For a few horrifying seconds Anson fought to free his finger, frightened, uncomprehending, wondering if he had inflicted some unmentionable physical injury on the girl—then the strap broke and she jumped to her feet and ran up the stairs, still crying, loud, agonized sobs,

her mouth wide open.

Nearly a month passed before Anson discovered what it was all about from her friend--the girl he should have taken to the dance.

"I expect it had something to do with her bobbies, didn't it?" she said, tossing her head.

"Her bobbies?" said Anson.

"Yes, her titties, you dope. She's got such silly little ones, and she's always getting in a tizzy because she thinks everybody'll laugh at them."

Anson gazed at her in dismay. The girl had such neat and perky little breasts. That was why he wanted to touch them. He was so upset he tried to explain to her what had happened and persuade her to explain it to her friend. But she kept bursting out laughing--a combination of malice and genuine amusement--and Anson realized sadly that he had alienated both of them.

"You are a long way away tonight, aren't you?" said Daphne. "Why so moody all of a sudden?"

"Nothing in particular--or at least, nothing I can talk about."

"Why not?"

"Because...well, because it would be embarrassing for both of us."

"Oh, balls!" said Daphne irritably. "I'm so sick of hearing that. All my life I've had to live with people who think it's pukka to be reticent."

"You really want everyone to tell each other everything, no matter how sordid it is?"

"Why not? We're all in the same boat. We're all scared of each other--afraid to say what we want to say in case somebody laughs."

Anson thought about this for a moment, then shook his head. "No, it's more complicated than that," he objected. "I was talking to Reggie about this sort of thing the other night and in the end we decided it was impossible to be totally honest. If you are, you're liable to end up finding yourself unacceptable. And when that happens, you've reached what Reggie calls the abyss...."

"But if we're all the same, who's to say we're unacceptable--whatever that means?"

Anson grimaced. "You're being deliberately naive," he complained.

"No I'm not. Why don't we try it. Tell me what you were thinking just now and let's see what happens?"

"All right, I will," he said abruptly, sitting up and reaching for his drink. "But I know what'll happen--you'll laugh your head off."

Anson told her the story, briefly as he could, not looking at her and trying not to make himself appear less foolish than he had been. When he finished, Daphne didn't laugh; instead she smiled so affectionately he felt a glow of happiness.

"You poor thing," she said. "And knowing you, I suppose you've been blaming yourself ever since?"

"Oh, not quite as dramatic as all that. But what's always worried me is why I said 'I can't find it'. Of all the hundreds of things I could've said—why did I have to come out with something so--so...."

"Because you were embarrassed, scared...because you're such a funny ducks about women. You still think we're sugar and spice and all things nice. But we're not, of course—we even have nasty, lustful ideas sometimes. That girl obviously did. She wanted you to make love to her—the real thing. And when you took so long to kiss her she probably got in a panic and thought you didn't want her...."

"Daphne," he broke in abruptly, "will you tell me something--something really important?"

She turned her head on the cushion to look at him again. "I'll have to try, won't I. I started this telling everything jag."

"Do you think...do you think I'm a man? I mean, d'you think there's anything wrong with me...."

Anson broke off, wishing miserably he'd never started to ask the question. But when he glanced at Daphne, the look of shock in her wide grey eyes was much too genuine to leave any doubts in his mind.

"Oh, Anson," she said, reaching impulsively for his hand. "What silly, dreadful things have you been thinking? Of course I know you're a man. Whatever made you worry about something so...so incredibly silly?"

"Well, you kept suggesting I should have a mammy. And...and the Africans think there's something wrong with me because I won't--Bill Gilby told me so."

"My God," she sighed. "How easy it is to hurt each other without meaning to. And it's so hard, so awfully hard to explain. I wanted you to have a girl because then I could imagine I was the girl and...and somehow the thought that it was a black girl made it more exciting. Christ, that sounds depraved—but I'm afraid it's true."

Anson was much too happy to reply. He put his head back and closed his eyes, squeezing her hand and thinking how easily and beautifully they could make love now. There would be no embarrassments, no pathetic difficulties about

clothes after what they had said to each other. And after all, what possible difference would it make if they did. He was here now, and if anyone had seen him they would be condemned in any case. But that wasn't true, he realized sadly. Whether anyone knew it or not, it would be a betrayal. If only he could forget the expression on George's face when he first saw Anson, as Anson stepped down off the train. Or the faintly quizzical one after the rock had hit him--the look of mild curiosity.

He moved his head and opened his eyes to look at her. She was reaching forward to put her drink down on the low coffee table in front of them. As she did so, the fold of her housecoat swung away from her and he saw that she wasn't wearing pyjamas. He could see one breast, see it quite clearly in the orange glow diffused by her housecoat. It was as perfect as the line of her throat, the nipple high and the breast curving out and down again below it. She turned, saw him looking and moved instinctively to cover herself--then changed her mind, lifting the hand she was holding gently up to her breast and pressing it with her other one as she leaned over to kiss him.

Anson sank back slowly against the back of the settee. Her breast was cool and delicious under his hand, her lips exquisitely soft. When they finally moved apart, he saw that her eyes were wide open. She was looking at him so calmly another twinge of apprehension seized him as he wondered what was going through her mind.

"Let me go," she said, and Anson did, flushing with the shock of disappointment. She sat up, put her hand to his cheek and kissed him again, softly.

"Oh, Anson, I love you so much--and we're not going to spoil it with any silly fuss about clothes." She slipped out of her housecoat and swung her legs back onto the settee behind him, doubling them up to her chest, then straightening them out again with the swift grace of a cat. She lay perfectly still, hands beside her, eyes closed.

It was a moment of such immaculate beauty Anson's thoughts more or less ceased to function, but for a faint anxiety that he wouldn't be able to recall it clearly enough afterwards. She had such a glorious body, small-boned and delicate, yet with muscles that moved in sleek ripples under the pale skin. Her breasts lay slightly apart, smooth and white, with a semi-circle of sun tan arching down from her shoulders, just touching the cleft between them. Anson smiled to himself as he recalled how often he had looked down at it, then looked away again quickly in case any one should notice. Her navel was a tiny, buff-coloured acorn, and she had a crescent-shaped scar right on the bone of

one thigh. Anson ran his finger tip along it, wondering how she'd got it, then touched the hair on the small mound below her stomach. It was a swirl of honey, startlingly blond compared to her head. He looked up and saw that her eyes were open. She reached up to unclip the catch on his shorts.

"Come on, off with them," she said, wrinkling up her nose at him in a little smile and closing her eyes tightly. "I won't peek."

Anson forced his gym shoes off his heels and stood up to drop his shorts to the ground, then sat down again and began to caress her. Daphne sighed a long, contented sigh and shut her eyes. It was the sort of scene he had visualized so often he couldn't believe it was really happening; and all at once he wanted to preserve the moment, to stay just as they were. But soon she began to move under his hands, reaching for him eventually, putting her hand on his waist and pressing him gently towards her.

"Come on," she whispered, "or you'll be too late."

He knelt between her legs, and as he lowered himself onto her, she slipped her hand between them. It was like a small, delicate bird guiding him, and he sank into her with a groan of almost unendurable pleasure. She was sleek and silky, yet somehow with a sort of grainy sensation which made him catch his breath—a pleasure so vivid he saw a flash of bright white light on his eyelids. He opened them in surprise and Daphne looked up at him as he lay still for a moment.

"What is it, sweetie?"

"I could have sworn I saw a white flash. Must be lightning. The rains are coming early this year."

"Thunder and lightning—how wonderful." He felt her giggle. "It's the storm inside me."

"Daphne," he said huskily. "Am I...am I all right?"

She looked up at him gravely, an expression of utter peace and contentment on her face. Her lips seemed to be plumped out somehow, moist and almost puffy.

"Yes," she sighed. "Oh Christ, yes...."

He felt her legs slide softly up the back of his own as she began to move again, and Anson shut his eyes as he started on the long journey that is really so very short, and which nobody has ever been able to describe.

## CHAPTER 22

George Pemberton returned to Kuwassi on Tuesday. He came on the train that was due in at two o'clock and finally arrived at eleven than night. The railways, like everything else in the colony, were in a state of confusion bordering on chaos. Anson saw him only briefly the following morning before going underground, but he concluded from George's expression that the meeting had been a flop. In the afternoon, when Anson finished calculating the averages on the latest batch of assay results, he sat trying to think of an excuse to go and see him so that he could find out what had happened. He looked up with a start as George suddenly walked into his office.

"Thank you for entertaining my wife while I was in Accra," he said.

For a terrible moment Anson thought he was going to choke. "Not at all," he managed to mumble. "It's always a pleasure." He looked up at last, but George had walked across to the window and he had his back turned.

"Hear you had another spot of bother while I was away?"

"Yes sir, on Friday. I don't know what it was all about. Just letting off steam, I think."

George grunted. "I daresay—but I wonder how long we're supposed to tolerate this nonsense. I've been looking at the tonnage from the mill. We're down nearly forty percent this month."

"What happened in Accra--anything constructive?"

George's shoulders moved in a shrug. "Lots of talk, but nobody's willing to stand up to them. I tried to persuade the Chamber to shut down all the mines for at least two weeks—put 'em on care and maintenance—that'd soon smarten the boys up. It's the women who really run things. If the mammies started to get short of food, they'd have 'em all back to work in no time. Trouble is, this damn labour government at home. They seem to want us to go down the drain. Fenner Brockway!" George shook his head contemptuously. "He thinks he's a latter day Wilberforce. The saviour of the black man...as long as he's sitting in London, comfortable and safe, drawing his salary...."

Anson smiled. Fenner Brockway had become a profanity during the past



few months. A hitherto insignificant backbencher, he had won sudden prominence as an ardent supporter of African independence. Ignoring the danger of pulling out of countries not yet prepared to govern themselves, he seemed to take delight in pointing out the gross irony of a democracy imposing arbitrary rule on another nation. And now there was the Reverend somebody or other, too—an Anglican clergyman who was touring Africa, reminding the coons that they were equal in the eyes of the Lord. Anson had remarked to the doctor that it was a strange religion which encouraged a man of God to become an agitator and preach a doctrine that might very easily lead to violence. Reggie looked at him, his brown eyes gleaming with satisfaction.

"Perfectly true," he agreed. "And that's just what Jesus Christ did."

Anson found it hard not to lose his temper because he couldn't for the life of him think of any answer.

"What do think's going to happen then, sir?" he asked George.

George was a long time replying. "As far as this particular mine's concerned," he said eventually, "we're going to put our foot down. London can whine as much as it likes, but if the boys don't settle down to work again within the next day or two, I'm going to call them together in the compound and give 'em an ultimatum—either they produce, or the mine closes down. 'Wildcat', that's the fashionable phrase: 'wildcat stoppages'." He turned to Anson with a brief smile. "Well, we'll give 'em a bit of tiger and see how their cats stand up. Incidentally," he added, glancing at Anson with such a look of confidence that Anson was forced to drop his eyes. "I'd be grateful if you wouldn't mention any of this to anyone. Particularly Cooper—he's bound to cry wolf. I'm hoping to get him shifted to another mine in a day or two and have Hampton take his place. In the meantime we'll just have to put up with him and try to keep him out of things as much as possible."

"Yes, of course sir. I don't see very much of him in any case."

George continued to look at him thoughtfully. "All this nonsense put it out of my mind, but I've been meaning to ask you for some time what your plans are for the future. Your tour'll be up in another month or so, won't it?"

"Yes—another five weeks."

"I hope you're not thinking of leaving us?"

"Well...."

"Everyone's more than satisfied with your...your performance. So I

think I can promise you a comfortable increase in salary next year."

"That's...that's very good of you sir. And I've been meaning to come and ask your advice. But I kept putting it off, too, because of all this palaver. The thing is...the way things are going, will there be a job next year?"

George turned a chair round and sat down opposite Anson, straddling it and putting his arms on the back. It was an oddly informal position for him. "You know, this is just the kind of talk we must avoid. We've got to stand up to them...show 'em we've got backbone. In my opinion, the next week or two should be decisive--and I'm quite certain that if we're firm enough, we can bring 'em to heel."

Anson looked out of the window unhappily. The day shift was coming up and the now familiar shouting and commotion round the timekeeper's office was growing louder with every skipload that came to the surface. George seemed oblivious to the noise. He was obviously appealing to Anson to stand by him. Despite his quaint, country-squire phrases, he conveyed an impression of unmistakable sincerity--of a conviction that Anson was one of the few people on the mine, if not the only one, with the sort of integrity and self-assurance--which George would probably call breeding--to bring the Africans to heel. Anson kept wondering what his expression would be if he found out about Friday night. Even thinking about it make him smooth his hair down nervously.

"Perhaps...perhaps I could come and see you about it in a week or two, sir?"

George nodded. "Yes, of course--whenever you feel like it." He stood up and walked across to the window, shaking his head as he looked out. "Starting to perform again. Well, this time there won't be any police. I think I'll stroll up to the shaft and see what's going on."

He started to walk towards the door, then paused. "Oh, by the way--what are the results out in the west end this month? 16/25 and 26?"

Anson reached for his clipboard of sample sheets. "Two-six, one-four, two-nine...there's only one above four," he replied.

George frowned. "Somehow, we're going to have to get started on that new stuff down at the ventilation shaft. I'd better get a telegram off to Dawson."

Anson sat fanning himself with his blotter after George left. His thoughts were hopelessly confused. On the one hand he felt ridiculously happy,

on the other a sense of shame growing stronger all the time. He could never spend another year here—it was bound to end in disaster. Yet neither could he contemplate leaving Daphne for good. And to make matters worse, Daphne's behaviour after Friday had been peculiarly disturbing. She had evidently decided to ignore what happened altogether. The Mannings took her to the dance on Saturday night and Anson sat at their table. But she was very off-hand with him, refusing dances and treating him very much as she treated Charles Liddell or Comings, or any of the other young men on the mine.

"Sweetie," she said, with a touch of impatience, when she finally agreed to dance with him towards the end of the evening, "do stop looking so boot-faced. It was a lovely, wonderful experience...don't spoil it all by being tacky now."

Anson looked at her resentfully, but there was really nothing he could do or say. He was reminded of what a girl once told him during the war. She was the wife of a navigator on the squadron who had been posted away on a short course, and she came alone one night into the pub where they did most of their drinking. Anson drove her home afterwards. A little drunk, and not really meaning it, he asked her if he could come in. The girl was obviously tempted, but in the end she shook her head regretfully.

"No," she said. "It wouldn't work. Either you'd be disappointed, and go round telling everybody I was a little tart; or you'd like it so much you'd want to do it again—and we can't."

How pleasantly and sensibly she had let him down, thought Anson, hoping she'd been happy since then. And when he played golf with Daphne on Sunday morning, he realized how right the girl had been. Daphne had become almost as remote as a stranger. She spoke very little, and when she did, her remarks were so impersonal he felt like grabbing her by the arms and shaking her.

"Why won't you talk to me?" he demanded sulkily. "Am I being punished, or something?"

"I like that! You're the one who's always saying you must concentrate to play decent golf," she reminded him with a smile.

Anson put the blotter down, pulled his calculating machine towards him and tried to get on with some work. Concentrate, he reflected irritably, what was one supposed to concentrate on at a time like this? He kept making mistakes with the figures, knew he would have to do the whole lot over again. After ten or fifteen minutes he pushed the machine away and gave it up, realizing, as he

looked through the window, that the commotion at the shaft had died down. George had done it again.

But when he arrived at work the following morning, another uproar was in progress. The first Africans were supposed to go underground at six o'clock, and for some reason they had refused. It was all very involved—something to do with seniority and status and which boys should be the first into the skip. Anson was forced to hang around until nearly nine o'clock before he could go down. He watched the Africans curiously while he was waiting. They were having the time of their lives, shouting and arguing in a passion of vehemence, then suddenly bursting into happy laughter at the extravagance of their own invective. It was a game, a delightful change from the boredom of routine. And when he finally did manage to get down the mine, he discovered that virtually no work was being done. Jackhammers had mysteriously broken down, or the air had been turned off in some remote and inaccessible section. The only good thing about it, thought Anson, was that he could walk in and get his sampling done now without any of the frustrating arguments so common in the past.

After lunch, Anson dropped into George's office to tell that things had just about come to a standstill underground.

"Yes, I know," said George, "and when they get to the surface, they're going to get their last warning. I've asked the shiftbosses to keep the boss-boys at the shaft so that I can speak to them."

The warning, when George delivered it, was brief and explicit: if things didn't improve on Friday morning, he would close down the mine. His announcement was received with a mixture of defiance and dismay. Up to now, only the contract miners had been losing any money. Normally, they could expect to earn between twelve and eighteen pounds a month with their footage bonuses. But if they failed to break any footage, they still received eight shillings a shift—about ten pounds a month—and they were satisfied, for a little while at any rate, to accept this loss because they were enjoying themselves so much. Sobered by George's announcement, the bossboys soon became belligerent again. Once more they threatened to strike; and then, perhaps realizing the failure of logic implied in their threat, they returned to the compound in an ugly mood.

At half-past six, after a game of tennis against Comings vigorous enough to make him forget his anxieties for a little while, Anson went up to the club for a drink. They were beginning to strike up a rather pleasant friendship; but Comings, who had just bought himself a motor-cycle, drove home to bathe and

change first, and Anson sat down with George, who was having his invariable sundowner on the verandah.

"Where's Daphne?" he inquired.

"Oh, she's not feeling quite up to snuff tonight." George paused and looked at Anson for a moment before adding: "That time of the month, don't you know?"

Anson drank his beer with a little chill of dismay. It was the sort of remark George would only make to somebody he regarded as utterly reliable—to someone, in fact, who was a very close friend. It even crossed his mind that George was beginning to treat him like a mature and trustworthy son, and he felt more uncomfortable than ever.

"What do you think's going to happen tomorrow morning?" he asked, gesturing with his head to the noise from the compound, which was already disconcertingly loud.

"Hard to say. Be another palaver, I suppose. They must have realized by now how futile their threat to strike was, when I've already warned them I'm going to shut down if they don't get back to work." George finished his drink and put the glass carefully on the table. "I've called a meeting at four o'clock. Told the shiftbosses to advise everyone I want to speak to them in the Assembly Hall, down in the compound. I shall merely tell them it's a last warning. If they cause any more stoppages, they'll all be dismissed without their benefits—and that I'm going to have them removed from the compound. Be interesting to see their faces. It obviously hasn't occurred to them yet that I can. Anyway—it's bound to result in some sort of showdown. And that's what we've got to have now."

Anson drank his beer without replying and looked out over the verandah rail. The fireflies were out, tracing delicate patterns in the warm night as they flitted about their inscrutable errands in the hedge. It was a lovely, peaceful sight, curiously incompatible with the dull and savage roars which rose from the compound every few minutes. Two thousand of them, he thought—and what, about forty Europeans? Damn near fifty to one, and they had nothing, absolutely nothing to face them with if the coons ever really did get out of hand. The Governor had signed an Order-in-Council two weeks ago, requiring all Europeans to turn in their guns, and Vickers had gone round collecting them. So they had nothing but some absurd mystique. Yet George was obviously secure in his conviction that he could, as he put it, "bring 'em to heel." He was sitting on the verandah, perfectly relaxed, just as he had for nearly twenty

years at this time of night. Surely he must be right. Looking at his face, silhouetted against the light streaming through the doors from the lounge, Anson felt reassured. Nothing very much could go wrong while George was around. He glanced away as Comings's motor-bike came up the road.

"If you'll excuse me, sir?" he said, rising. "I played tennis with Comings and I promised to buy him a drink."

"Yes, of course." George held his wrist out towards the light to see the time. "Might send the steward out to me. Time for one more, then I must get back to dinner. Er—just one thing before you go. Hampton's down with a touch of fever, so if we have to have this palaver down in the village tomorrow afternoon, I'd like you to come along. Be good experience for you."

"Thank you very much, sir. I'm...I'm sure it will," said Anson, glad that George couldn't see the momentary look of dismay which must have come to his face. What if he couldn't conceal his nervousness this time, and made a real fool of himself? He left George and joined Les Comings at the bar, where he drank a good deal more than he had intended to.

A strike was in fact attempted the following morning, but it was more or less a complete fiasco. Some two-thirds of the day shift turned up at the shaft in time to go underground, and Anson suspected that most of the missing third had drunk too much palm wine the previous evening. The atmosphere was subdued, and although Kwotze, accompanied by two henchmen in incongruously natty European suits, tried to harangue the miners, he could make no impression on them. Once again, however, the shift was an almost totally unproductive one. Anson heard very few drills running as he made his way to the stope he was going to sample, and he saw groups of boys sleeping off their hangovers in secluded cross-cuts. Shortly after ten o'clock, the twelve-inch compressed air pipe in the main shaft fractured. It had obviously been blasted with a stick of dynamite, and all work underground had to be suspended until it was repaired. The shift was brought to the surface and sent back to the compound, with instructions to be in the Assembly Hall at two o'clock.

Anson ate his lunch, trying to pretend to himself he wasn't nervous. But he was, of course; and the fatuous conversation between Henry and Charles about what was happening irritated him all the more because, in their ignorance, they were totally unconcerned. When he got back to the office, he struggled to get some work done, and it was almost with a sense of relief that he greeted George when he came in at twenty to two. George was wearing a fawn-coloured panama suit with a soft straw hat on his head. He looked impressively spruce

and businesslike and Anson glanced at him with a faint frown of surprise as he realized how remarkably handsome he was.

"Ready?" George inquired, in a tone that was almost blithe. He might have been on his way to an investiture to receive some honour.

"I, er—I'm afraid I haven't got a hat, sir."

"Never mind. I don't anticipate this is going to last more than a few minutes—and you've got a tie on, I see." George glanced at Anson's clean khaki shirt and black tie approvingly.

They walked out to the parking lot to the new company Wolseley, which had come out on the last boat. Poor old Arthur, thought Anson. He had been demanding a new car to replace the defunct Armstrong-Syddley, which had been the general manager's car since 1936, and now his successor had got it. They rode down to the compound, Anson feeling more and more confident. There was something undeniably reassuring about riding in the back of a gleaming new, chauffeur-driven car, and he was beginning to enjoy himself.

When they pulled up in front of the ubiquitous building known as the Assembly Hall, Africans were still straggling towards it. The building was really nothing more than a vast, thatched roof, some two hundred feet long by seventy feet wide, and it was used variously as a beer hall, a dance hall, a union headquarters, and sometimes for the relics of tribal ceremonies which had survived. A timber post supported the roof at intervals of about fifteen feet. Between them, raffia mats had been stretched as walls. They left a gap of two or three feet top and bottom, and Anson remembered that it was surprisingly cool inside. He saw, as they walked from the car into the building, that several policemen were patrolling outside—dressed in their ridiculously heavy blue serge, which made their faces shine perpetually with sweat—but there was no sign of Peter Chard.

His eyes took a moment or two to adjust to the gloom, but Anson was conscious of a huge buzz of conversation dying down abruptly as they entered, and of the powerful smell of Africans. It wasn't an acrid smell, or even an unpleasant one, really; there was a kind of sweetness to it that reminded him of something he couldn't quite recapture. He began to make out the vast mass of black faces, concentrated on George and himself with an odd mixture of insolence and respect. There was a small platform some fifteen feet from the door. It was not much more than a wooden box, about four feet square, with a lectern nailed to a four-by-two on the front. George stepped up onto it and there was just room for the constable he had obtained from Chard as an inter-

preter to stand beside him. The constable was armed with his bamboo staff. He placed one end of it on the ground like a rifle and stood very much properly at ease while George looked around at his audience.

When he began to speak, he did so quietly, pausing after every sentence to allow the interpreter to repeat it in Fanti. The constable's voice was disconcertingly expressionless. Anson, who had remained standing by the wall just inside the entrance to the building, looked away from him at the audience and saw Kwotze's big shock of hair two or three rows back and right in front of George. Neither of the two henchmen Anson had seen that morning were with him, nor any of the union leaders. Anson began to search for them and found one over by the wall to the right, clownish in his brown suit, but with a disturbingly confident air about him. He thought he recognized Amanquah, standing near the back of the hall, before he glanced back at George. A profound silence had descended on everyone as George paused to choose his words. It was so quiet that when a pig squealed somewhere out in the compound, Anson turned his head irritably, as if to quell the noise.

George's tone was anything but domineering. He spoke almost casually, a man stating simple, incontrovertible facts. But when he concluded with the warning that everyone would be dismissed and removed from the compound--and the constable repeated the warning in his flat, machine-gun syllables--a great sighing groan of anger arose. George looked round at them dispassionately, and he was just beginning to turn away when Kwotze's voice rang out, shrill and arresting. He was waving what looked like a small stack of postcards in one hand. He began to pass them out to the Africans around him, and Anson saw people doing the same thing in different parts of the hall. Individual voices quickly merged into a roar; the noise became almost deafening. Then it gradually changed. Kwotze was shouting one word; Anson couldn't make out what it was, but others soon took it up until it became a chant--a ferocious, chilling surge of reiterated noise which dulled the senses.

George turned back to the crowd, alert, but perfectly undismayed. They had begun to press forward, their eyes shining in the gloom, their mouths gaping as they screamed in unison. Anson swung instinctively to run out of the door, and had to force himself to turn back. He wanted to look towards George to see if he was all right, but his eyes were fixed on a wiry little Ga with livid tribal scars running vertically down the side of his face. Cheeks slit open, ashes rubbed into the slits to make sure they stayed open. Jesus. A man in front of the Ga slipped, went down on his knees. The Ga stooped solicitously



to help him up. He had one of the postcards clenched between his teeth. Why on earth in his mouth? thought Anson irritably. With an effort he moved his eyes to watch someone--someone with a bright blue skull cap perched on his head like the top of a technicolour acorn--punch another African in the face for no apparent reason. His gaze shifted again to the platform, just in time to see the constable raise his staff and bring it down once before he was jerked off his feet and disappeared. George was still there. For a moment or two longer, a curiously static moment, he stood above the crowd, tall and dignified; then abruptly he seemed to disintegrate, yanked into grotesque and ludicrous postures as clutching hands tore first at one arm, then the other. As he fell forward off the platform, a black object rose above him--a club of some sort--and at last Anson managed to break loose from the numbness which had gripped him. He leapt forward with a great shout; but a white flash of pain exploded behind his eyes as something struck him in the face, and he staggered back against the wall. He shook his head, discovered he could still see, and tried to lunge forward again. This time somebody was holding his arm, pulling him back. He turned savagely to throw him off and found himself looking into Peter Chard's clear blue eyes.

"Steady on, old boy," he shouted calmly into Anson's ear. "This is our palaver now." He turned to the corporal beside him. "Gas, one time," he roared. The corporal reached into the canvas pouch hanging from his belt and handed Chard a small can. Chard held his thumb over a lever, stripped off the piece of adhesive tape securing it, and tossed the can quickly towards where George had been standing. As soon as he let it go there was a dull whoosh and white smoke began to pour from it.

"Another one." Chard threw two more into the crowd, lobbing them overarm like a grenade, well back into the hall. Thin screams of pain rose above the uproar as the tear gas took effect and almost at once the crowd broke, surging against the raffia walls until they burst like a paper bag, and then pounding blindly across the compound in all directions. The wall behind Anson was still standing, and Chard pulled him back through the door to get away from the gas. When it cleared, the building was empty but for a dozen figures, sprawled here and there like dolls scattered about on a nursery floor. As Anson began to follow Chard back in, he saw several of them stagger to their feet, their hands clutched to their eyes.

George lay face down, two or three feet away from the constable, his clothes very nearly torn completely off him. There were four deep scratch

marks right down the centre of his spine. One leg had somehow become reversed, both the knee and the toe of his shoe pointing upward. His head lay at an impossible angle to his shoulders and Anson's stomach lurched as he saw the back of it. It was a glistening red and purple jelly, decorated with slivers of blue-white bone lying like sliced almonds on the surface. A dark stain was spreading slowly out across the red mud floor. He turned away and bent over to retch, but succeeded only in belching the sour taste of disbelief into his mouth. As he straightened up he saw Chard kneeling beside George's body, putting a handkerchief over his head to keep the flies off, then his eye fell on one of the postcards on the floor. The card was lying face down. He stooped to pick it up, turned it over and stood looking at it for a long time without moving.

How odd he'd never thought of that, he reflected dully. It seemed so...so sophisticated and unlikely, somehow. Yet it was a professional photograph, taken with a flashbulb, the details sharp and clear. Whoever took it must have been standing just inside the kitchen door. The top of Anson's head was partly obscured by the bowl of cannas on the coffee table—but nothing else was. Daphne had her eyes closed. She was wearing that dreamy but curiously intent expression, half-pleasure, half-pain, which he had only observed once before on the face of the young mammy in Obuassi. One breast bulged out voluptuously under Anson's chest, and his buttocks were contracted into two hard ridges of muscle in the sharp glare of the flashbulb. Remembering the moment when it was taken a spark of helpless anger stirred in Anson, but it died down almost at once. As if in another room, he heard Chard instructing the corporal to arrest Kwotze and the union leaders; then Chard came across to him and Anson heard him gasp as he looked over his shoulder at the photograph.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. He turned to look at Anson's face and took him gently by the elbow. "Come on, whack—we'd better get you up to the hospital. That's a nasty cut on your face. What hit you?"

Mechanically, Anson tucked the photograph into the breast pocket of his shirt. "Haven't a clue," he shrugged.

Chard frowned sympathetically and led Anson quickly across to the jeep. They drove up the hill in silence and Anson looked at him curiously, wondering what was going on behind that ruddy, uncomplicated face.

"Did you find out about Kwotze?" he asked.

"Eh? Oh, yes...he's not the same one. I had him in to check and saw right away that he wasn't."

"What'll happen to him now?"

"Depends what we find out. Have to charge him with inciting violence, anyway."

"I suppose I'll have to be a witness?"

"Not to worry, old boy. Cross that bridge when we come to it."

When they arrived at the hospital, Chard handed Anson over to one of the orderlies, gave him a quick, embarrassed pat on the shoulder, then left at once to drive back down to the compound. Anson sat down in Reggie's surgery and he was just about to take the photograph out and look at it again when the doctor hurried in.

"What the hell happened?" he demanded--then shook his head as he saw Anson's face. "Never mind, we can talk about that later...."

"George's dead," said Anson flatly.

"What? Are you sure?"

"Yes, for Christ's sake, of course I'm bloody well sure. They beat the back of his head in. Chard threw tear gas at them. Another couple of minutes and they'd have literally torn him to pieces."

Reggie reached up with his hand, turned Anson's face towards the light to look at the cut on his cheek. "Hm--nothing serious. What was it?"

"Chunk of wood, I think. I didn't see."

"What we both need very badly right now is a drop of anaesthetic," the doctor grunted, turning to open the drawer of his desk and take out a bottle of whiskey. He walked across to the washbasin for another glass, poured two big tots and handed one to Anson. Anson drank more than half of it in one gulp and thought for a moment he was going to throw it right back up again. But he didn't, and the burning sensation in his throat and chest seemed to revive his anger. He sat quiet and tense in the chair while Reggie worked on his cheek.

"No point in stitches," he grunted. "You're going to have a scar in any case. I'll just put some plaster on it."

When the doctor finished, he put the kidney bowl on a table, washed his hands and walked back to the desk for his drink. "Feel like talking about it yet?" he inquired.

"What do you want me to say? I've told you what happened."

Reggie took a sip of his drink and looked at Anson thoughtfully. "You know, it'll probably sound revoltingly callous in the circumstances, but something like this was bound to happen in the end. We can't go on treating them like children. George thought they were, and he was wrong--but there was no

way of making him see that."

"Oh shit yes, he was wrong all right. He trusted me, the poor, silly, honourable bastard."

"Trusted you? What the hell are you talking about?"

"You know, he had something none of us'll ever have. Something clean and...and bright."

"You're not making much sense...."

"The trouble is, I am—because it would have been the same old story. George warned them that if they didn't stop bugging about, he'd fire the lot of them and have them turfed out of the compound. They would have listened to him, too, and done what they were told if it hadn't been for this."

Anson took the photograph out of his pocket and handed it to Reggie without looking at him. He heard him suck in his breath, but Anson's thoughts kept drifting away irrelevantly. He found himself worrying about a catch he had dropped in a match more than a month ago. It had puzzled him then, and it still puzzled him. He had focussed on it in plenty of time, but the ball went right through his hands without touching them.

Reggie tapped the edge of the photograph on the table. "So you did make the beast with two backs, after all. I wondered about that."

"God Almighty!" said Anson. "Even at a time like this you have to trot out your seedy literary cliches." He nodded his head savagely. "Yes, we made the beast all right, and now everybody in the whole bloody colony can gloat over us."

"I suppose it wouldn't help much if I told you that this is actually a very beautiful photograph? Dirty pictures always have dirty people in them—and neither of you are that. You were just...."

"My upright, honourable back makes good pornography, you mean?" said Anson bitterly.

Reggie sighed. "If only we didn't have to have sex to mess things up," he said, putting the photograph face down on the desk. "Boethius was right...."

"You and your fucking literature," Anson burst out furiously. "A fat lot you've ever got out of it. You read it and then have to go and stupify yourself with booze because all it ever does is remind you how disgusting we are—how greedy and selfish and...and vicious we are." Anson tried to blink back the tears of anger in his eyes. "Jesus Christ!" he shouted, smashing his hand down on the desk as he saw a fly buzzing at the screen on the window. "You can't even keep the bloody flies out of this squalid little surgery of yours."

Reggie turned to look at the fly. "I know," he agreed sadly. "There's always at least one there. When I first came I used to try and get rid of them--opened the door and tried to chase them out with the blotter. All that did was fill the room with flies. They get in through a hole somewhere."

The fly began a little dance, bobbing crazily against the wire mesh for a few seconds, then fell on its back on the sill and revolved slowly, its wings whining almost as shrilly as a fingernail drawn across a pane of glass. In the end, its wings struck the screen, flipping it over. It stroked them busily with its legs for a moment, then squatted motionless, multiple eyes almost touching the screen.

Anson looked out over the top of it--out across the road and the euphorbia hedges, their thick pulpy leaves dusted red with laterite; out across the gleaming sand of the waste dump and the doll's house bungalows on the other side of the valley. He gazed hopelessly past them all at the imperturbable little hills, purplish-blue under the brassy afternoon sun. The fly began its mindless assault on the screen again, bouncing off the wire mesh with little pinging thuds.

In spite of the heat, the trickle of sweat already soaking into the dressing on his cheek, Anson shivered.